



# JEEVADHARA

## **HINDU-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS**

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**Edited by**  
**Sebastian Painadath**

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# jeevadhara

A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

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## Hindu-Christian Relations

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# JEEVADHARA

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## Editorial

There is a healthy attitude to the diversity of religions at the basis of the Indian social fabric. This is evident in the good neighbourly relations cultivated quite spontaneously by Hindus and Christians over generations. Christians esteem the spiritual openness of Hindus, and Hindus appreciate the social concern of Christians. At many levels of civic life they work together for the promotion of health and education, social integration and ethical formation. Strengthen this basic culture harmony - this is the goal of inter-religious dialogue

Certain recent events however have raised a serious question: Is there a rupture growing in Hindu-Christian relations? If so, who is responsible for this malaise? How to overcome the prejudices poisoning both the communities? This issue of *Jeevadhara* pursues these questions.

Thomas Chillikulam with a team of theology students made an on the spot study of the tragic events which took place in the Kandhamal district in Orissa, 2008.<sup>1</sup> With a thorough historical analysis he shows how fear is fomented in the Hindu minds by the provocative Christian proselytism and in the Christian circles by the aggressive Hindu fundamentalism. Both the communities need a critical self-introspection

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1. The Recent Attack on Christians in Orissa, A Theological Response, by Gyanoday, Jesuit Regional Theology Centre, Patna, Published by Prabhat Prakashan, Digba Ghat, Patna 800011, 2009., pages, 129. Cfr. Anto Akkara, Kandhamal, A Blot on Indian Secularism, Media House, 375-A Pocket 2, Mayur Vihar Ph-I Delhi 110091, 2009, Pages 128. The Statement of the Indian Theological Association on the Orissa Conflicts 2008, can be got through the President of the Secretary of the ITA, C/o NBCLC, POB. 8426, Bangalore 560084

to promote a culture of respect for each other, love for the Indian culture and a common commitment to the integrity of the nation.

A far-sighted vision of Hindu-Christian relations to forestall such tragic happenings needs a new theology in dialogue with the Indian heritage. Three scholars, who had done their doctoral dissertation on the sources of the Hindu heritage, reflect on how Hindu-Christian relations could be deepened by an inter-religious hermeneutics: one religion interpreting the other. Anand Amaladas offers several instances of a fruitful Hindu-Christian encounter in the areas of spirituality and theology, art and literature, popular religiosity and symbolism. Francis D'Sa shows how an interface of the Christian anthropo-cosmivision and the Hindu karmic cosmivision could make the worldviews of each richer and more relevant for today. Subhash Anand argues for a genuine respect for the religious difference of the other while emphasizing the underlying unity; for Christians this would mean reliving the humaneness of Jesus in encountering the religious other. All the three authors give examples of a possible theological exploration into the deeper meaning of mysteries like the Trinity, the Christ and the Eucharist in dialogue with Hindu perceptions. Through such a creative process Christians would feel that they are rooted in the culture of this land; and Hindus would rediscover the liberative potential of religious experience. This is the way to deepen the Hindu-Christian relations in India. Two current issues have also been taken up for theological reflection. In the context of the discussions in India on acknowledging women's role in civic life and political process Aleyamma Vijayan analyses the patriarchal mindset of the people as the basic cause of the discrimination of women in Indian society. Tissa Balasurya reads the Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* from an Asian perspective and points out that an honest acceptance of the Church's role in the past in promoting political colonialism would have made the message of the Pope more credible and powerful.

It is our hope that these theological reflections will contribute much to developing a culture of inter-religious harmony, especially for deepening the cordial relations between Hindus and Christians.

Sameeksha  
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S. Painadath



# **Rupturing Hindu-Christian Relations**

## **A Christian Introspection**

**Thomas Chillikulam**

Thomas Chillikulam SJ, who teaches theology at Gyanoday, Jesuit Theology Centre, Patna, traces the history of the relations between Christians and Hindus in India. He shows how the Hindutva fundamentalists with their aggressive tactics instil fear in the Christians and how certain evangelical groups with their offensive language evoke suspicion among the Hindus. He makes a courageous critique on the agenda of the Hindutva politics and on the intention of the proselytization projects of Christianity. He advocates a culture of mutual respect which alone ensures a harmonious co-existence of Hindus and Christians in India.

The Christians in India have never had so bad an experience. Starting on the eve of Christmas in 2007 and re-emerging in a massive way from the last week of August 2008, a spate of communal violence engulfed the Christians of Kandhamal district in Orissa. The magnitude of the Hindu fundamentalist rage was such that it reduced hundreds of Christian homes and dozens of worship places to rubble and took many innocent lives forcing thousands of poor people to flee to the jungles. In a catalytic effect, the violence seemed to spread beyond the state of Orissa to other states of India as well, causing consternation and fear among Christians. The violence in Kandhamal shocked the nation and the world. The French president termed it "genocide" and the Indian Prime Minister acknowledged it as a "national shame".

Kandhamal is symbolic. It is symbolic of a gradual yet severe rupture in a relatively harmonious relationship between the Hindu and Christian communities that existed for many centuries in India. In the following pages I intend to critically reflect on Hindu-Christian relations at three major levels: 1) Historical factors leading to Hindu-Christian conflicts 2) The underlying forces and factors causing rupture in Hindu-Christian relations and 3) A Christian self critique and theological response with a view to evolve and strengthen positive Hindu-Christian relations.

### **Hindu-Christian Relations: Beginnings**

A general impression among Hindus (and even among some Christians) in India is that the history of Christianity in India is concomitant to the European colonization of India. Sashi Tharoor, former U.N. undersecretary and eminent scholar, clears this misunderstanding: "There are Indians today whose ancestors were Christians well before any European discovered Christianity and before the forebears of many of today's Hindu chauvinists were even conscious of themselves as "Hindus".<sup>1</sup> Historians of the earliest Christian community in India are almost synonymous in stating that this ancient community, tracing their origin to the Apostle St. Thomas, coalesced so well with the Hindu community that they did not differ much from their Hindu neighbors culturally. That they also held an open and positive theology of other religions is evident from the documents of the Synod of Diamber, held in 1599 to condemn what the Portuguese thought to be the heretical practices of St. Thomas Christians. Act III, Decree 4 of the Synod denounces the belief of the St. Thomas Christians that each one can be saved in his own religion: "Each one can be saved in his own law, all laws are right - this is fully erroneous and most shameful heresy. There is no law in which we may be saved except the law of Christ our Saviour."<sup>2</sup>

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1 Sashi Tharoor, *Hindu Fundamentals Are Under Attack*, in *Times of India*, September 8, 2008.

2 Quoted from: Manickam, Thomas, *Christian Theological Approaches to Other Religions*" in (Ed.) Pathil Kuncheria, *Religious Pluralism: An Indian Christian Perspective*, Delhi, I.C.P.C.K 1991, p.147



Western missionaries of 16th to 18th centuries, by and large, tended to be inimical to Hindu religion. The Portuguese, having gained political power in Goa, considered it a state duty to teach the "true faith" to the Hindus even by "fire and sword". This is evident from the instruction King Manuel of Portugal gives to his generals, missionaries and merchants who came to India: "In order to persuade these people to accept the truth, the priests and friars are to put before them all natural and legal arguments.... and if these people remain stubborn in their errors and would not accept the tenets of the true faith...they should in this case be taught by fire and sword and all the horrors of war."<sup>3</sup> While the British did not have an open agenda to evangelize all Hindus, nonetheless most missionaries considered Hindu religion, its practices and symbols as diabolical and "the grandest living system of heathen error" as the Scottish missionary John Wilson puts it.<sup>4</sup>

A creative interaction and exchange between renaissance Hinduism and Christianity saw attempts by Hindu religious leaders, scholars and thinkers to appropriate Jesus Christ and assimilate Christian values. While Vivekananda placed Jesus Christ within the framework of Vedanta, Keshub Chandra Sen went on to call Jesus "our Jesus" who is "all together oriental, a perfect Asian in everything."<sup>5</sup> In spite of the positive attitude the reformist Hindu leaders had towards Christ and Christianity, they have minced no words to express their dislike for Christian exclusivism and proselytism.

### **Emerging Hindu Fears and the Rise of Hindutva**

Behind the events of Orissa and the present Hindu-Christian conflict lies a long history of Hindutva philosophy, politics and strategies beginning from the first quarter of twentieth century. At the heart of Hindutva movement was the assumed fear of annihilation of the Hindu race, its culture and religion by the invading foreign powers, namely the Muslims and then the British. Modern Hindutva came to its own

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3 Kuttianimattathil, Jose, *Practice and Theology of Interreligious Dialogue*, Bangalore: Khrist Jyoti Publications, 1998, p.19

4 Ibid. p.20

5 Painadath, Sebastian, "The Understanding of Christ in Indian Renaissance" in Jeevadhara, May 1999, p.166

with V.D. Savarkar's famous definition of the Hindu in 1923. In his booklet *Hindutva! Who is a Hindu?*, Savarkar defines who is a Hindu in an enigmatic style: "Every person is a Hindu who regards and owns this Bharat Bhumi - this land from the Indus to the Seas, as his Pitrubhumi (Fatherland) and Punyabhumi (Holy Land) - the land of origin of his religion and cradle of his faith".<sup>6</sup> According to this definition the followers of Brahmanism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism and the various tribes are Hindus because this is the cradle of their faith. In Savarkar's view territorial unity alone will not constitute common nationality, but religious, cultural, racial and historical affinities count immensely more in the formation of a nation. Savarkar was of the opinion that the Hindus are the bedrock on which the Indian Independent State could be established because "a true Hindu cannot but be a true national and a Hindu patriot worth the name can't but be an Indian patriot as well".<sup>7</sup> On the other hand a Muslim cannot be a true nationalist because India is neither their pitrubhumi nor their punyabhumi - "their holy land is far off in Arabia. Their mythology and godmen, ideas and heroes are not the children of this soil. ...their outlook smacks of foreign origin; their love is divided".<sup>8</sup> In Savarkar's Hindu nation Muslim community would get equitable treatment but they would be held as "suspicious friends" for at least some years to come for their "secret extra-territorial designs".

What about Christians? Unlike the Muslims, the Christian minority, Savarkar observed, was "civil, had no extra territorial political designs, was not linguistically and culturally averse to the Hindus and therefore could be politically assimilated with the Hindus."<sup>9</sup> Savarkar held a more positive attitude towards Christians albeit with some reservation on the issue of conversion. He was not against the presence of Christian Church in India but for a "true Indian Church". He promoted and supported the "National Indian Church" and its Bishop Williams was a personal friend of Savarkar.

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6 Keer, Dhanajay, *Veer Savarkar*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1988, p.263

7 Ibid, p.270

8 Ibid, p.266

9 Ibid. p.271



The foundation of Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) by Hedgewar in 1925 saw a new shift in the attitude of Hindu nationalists towards Christians. For Savarkar, the problem of minorities was not at all a problem of all minorities but the problem of only one minority, i.e. the Muslim minority. But with the emergence of RSS and its affiliates Christians began to be seen on a par with Muslims in terms of their lack of love for the country and its culture and even their separatist tendencies.

Golwalker who took over the RSS command from Hedgewar considered Christians as “internal enemy number two”, the number one being the Muslims. According to him- “They (Christians) are born in this land, no doubt. But are they true to its salt? No. Together with the change in their faith, gone are the spirit of love and devotion for the nation.”<sup>10</sup> Golwalker also condemned Indian Christians for allegedly preferring the English language, instead of Indian languages.

Hindutva’s basic assumption that only followers of the religions that have their origin in India can be true citizens of India goes totally against the spirit of Hinduism’s pluralistic ideals and heritage. Their contention that Muslims and Christians have extra-territorial loyalties and designs is a generalization that is far from truth. Yet, the RSS and its frontal organizations like, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Bajrang Dal etc. - under the nomenclature ‘Sangh Parivar’, are making every effort to show that the Christians and Moslems do not belong to this land.

## **Underlying Factors in Hindu-Christian Conflicts**

### ***1. Fomenting Fear- The Sangh Strategy:***

The Sangh Parivar’s designs run on the engine of fear. Hindu fundamentalist propaganda today has succeeded in instilling fear and suspicion towards the Christian minority in the minds of a large number of Hindus. On the issue of Christian proselytism and conversion there seems to be an agreement among Hindus that Christians hold ulterior motives in their missionary activities and the aggressive proselytism of the Christian missionaries go against the integrity of the nation.

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10 M.S. Golwalker, *We or Our Nationhood Defended*, Nagpur: 1938, p.128



Conversion is perceived by many as a departure from one's own culture, language and a shift of loyalties. Minority separatism, demographic shifts and anti-national activities are seen to be the dangerous consequences of large scale conversions.

It is to be noted that RSS activities are most visible in areas where Christian missionaries are active and effective i.e. among the Adivasis and the Dalits. In Orissa, Swami Lakshmanananda followed the wider Sangh strategy of countering the proselytizing activities of the Christian missionaries by projecting the Christians as anti-nationals, foreigners and cow-eaters. The Sangh Parivar, through their cultural and social organizations, aims to create intra-Hindu solidarity on the one hand and anti-Christian antagonism on the other. A large number of their publications demonize Christians as enemies and portray all charitable activities of the Christians as steps towards conversion. Swami Lakshmanananda succeeded in convincing the Adivasis that the Christians are their enemies, the "other", and Christianity is a foreign religion. He warned his audience that the Christians are about to outnumber them and destroy their culture and religion. Sudhir Pradhan, an RSS leader, echoes the Swami's tirade of hate against Christians: "Hindus worship cows, Christians eat cows"<sup>11</sup>

## ***2. Socio-Economic and Political Issues as Opportunities for Conflicts***

There is a consensus among analysts that at the root of all communal violence there are socio-economic and political motives that masquerade as inter-religious conflict. The secret agenda of the Hindutva forces to keep the Dalits and Adivasis socially, economically and politically discriminated and thereby maintain the upper caste hegemony is no more a hidden fact. On the other hand, Sangh Parivar has also been quick to grab socio-economic and political confrontations as opportunities to promote their Hindu nationalistic agenda. For example, Swami Lakshmanananda and his RSS team made full use of the historic ethnic divide between the Kandhas and the Panas. This strategy was

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11 Gyanoday RTC, Patna, *The Recent Attacks on Christians in Orissa*, Patna:Prabhat Prakashan,2009p.102

also used in the Gujrat anti-Christian riot of 1998 in which the Dalits and Tribals were pitted against each other in Dang district.

VHP leader Praveen Togadia's statement, "behind every election victory of the BJP there are scores of ideology-driven initiatives such as the one in Orissa",<sup>12</sup> points to the interplay of politics and communalism as a strategy. In Gujerat, Karnataka and Orissa anti-Christian riots were either preceded by or followed by elections. Communalism and politics in India feed on each other. The blatant inaction of the state machinery during riots in Gujrat and Orissa is a case in point.

### ***3. Christian Fundamentalism and Provocative Proselytism***

It would only be fair to admit that aggressive and zealous Christian proselytism and conversions, the bugbear which inspires the Hindutva zealots today, have also played its role in the rupture of Hindu-Christian relations. Aggressive Hinduisation and purification of the converts have been propelled by Christian efforts at conversion and have created a rancorous rivalry. At the forefront are new Christian denominations, energetic and zealous Evangelicals and Pentecostals eager to "plant a Church" where there is none.

The mainstream Churches receive much of their foreign funds for charitable purposes whereas the Evangelical Churches seem to receive funds largely for the purpose of conversions. In many cases, the amount of funds a pastor receives is said to be proportionate to the number of converts he has made. It is alleged that some of these groups receive huge funds. For example, according to a survey, during 2005-2006 Rs. 7,877 crores were received by different Christian NGOs of which the highest foreign donors were Gospel Fellowship Trust USA with 229 crores and Gospel for Asia with 137 crores. The largest recipient of the foreign funds was World Vision receiving Rs. 256 crores.<sup>13</sup> It is also alleged that Evangelical groups from the United States, through huge funds, have been using the Tsunami tragedy to further their

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12 Venkatesh Ramakrishnan, Parivar's Plans, in *Frontline*, Vol.25, Sept. 13-26, 2008. p.23

13 Gyanoday RTC, Patna, *The Recent Attacks on Christians in Orissa*, p.108

evangelistic goals. It must, however, be noted that Hindu fundamentalist organizations too receive huge funds – both local and foreign – to advance their cause.

Christian zealots have often been blatantly provocative in their approach and insensitive to the religious sentiments of the Hindus. For example, the immediate provocation for the 2008 anti-Christian attacks in Mangalore was the distribution of a pamphlet titled *Satya Darshini* in Kannada by the New Life Fellowship sect of the Pentecostal Mission. An excerpt (translated in English) reads like this: “Urvashi... is a prostitute. Vasishtha is the son of this prostitute who in turn married his own mother. Such a degraded person is the Guru of the Hindu god Rama... Krishna is a shady character; there is a need for us to liberate his misled followers”<sup>14</sup> Such disparaging remarks about Hinduism are born of a total ignorance of Hindu religion and utter disregard for Hindu sensibilities. In an open letter to Archbishop Bernard Mores of Bangalore, Vivek Bharat, a Hindu, writes: “I too have been badly hurt, dear Father, not once but repeatedly. Your compatriots have consistently trampled upon my sensibilities and millions of other Hindus like me.”<sup>15</sup> It would be naïve to ignore such Hindu voices as mere rant of a hate mongering fundamentalist. Such voices are getting more audible.

#### 4. Arrogant Theological Language

Christian Churches, even the mainstream Churches, still use exclusivist and arrogant theological language. Earlier the Hindus perhaps were not familiar with Christian theology and did not know what Christians thought of them. Today many educated Hindus are aware of the Christian theological language and the doctrinal imperatives which all can be threatening and offensive to Hindus. If not explained in a way intelligible to Hindus, terms like *Kingdom of God* and *Propagation of Faith* in India can smell of Christian expansionism. “Harvesting of Faith” can imply that Hindus are mere objects with no worth of their own. It is no secret that Pope John Paul II’s 1999 statement in Delhi, “just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted

14 Quoted from: Vivek Bharat, I Too Am Hurt Dear Father, <http://desicritics.org/> 2008

15 Ibid P.1



in the soil of Europe....in the third millennium a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent (Asia)” caused immense hurt to non-Christians who had warmly received him.

### **5. The ‘Foreign’ Face of Christians and Christianity**

Christians in India, especially those living in North India, are seen by a section of Hindus as not belonging to this land and its culture. The traditional Bollywood stereotype of a Christian is that of an English speaking, liquor consuming man and of a short-skirted woman with loose character. In fact, westernized and English speaking Christians in India are a small minority confined mainly to metropolitan cities. As Golwalker and his followers saw decades ago, Christians are still seen as promoters of English education and western culture. But the anomaly is that a big majority of students who throng to Christian schools for English medium education are the Hindus.

Christian religious institutions with their imposing structures tend to be intimidating and they do not look *religious* to many Hindus. The walls around these institutions become blocks – both physical and psychological – preventing spontaneous interaction with people of other religions. The life style, language and manners of Christian priests and religious are often not in tune with the local culture and way of life. The Indian value of hospitality is practiced only towards certain sections of people at selected times, while the common people are excluded. Our liturgy and celebrations fail to use local symbols, rituals and music.

### **Christian Responses to Hindu-Christian Conflict**

Our discussion on the history of Hindu-Christian relations and the various underlying factors that work as its determinants point to directions – both practical and theological – towards which we must move. In the following section I reflect theologically on some directions where Hindu-Christian relations could positively evolve.

#### **1. Confronting Fears, Cultivating Love**

Fear is one of the basic instincts of the humans and it produces tremendous power. All types of violence work on this power. By perpetrating violence the Sangh Parivar wants to instill fear among the minority Christians. A victim of Kandhamal expresses her deep-set

fear: “a whisper, a look, a comment are weapons in the hands of the powerful that make us shiver...they stare at me and I feel sick”<sup>16</sup> Christian fundamentalist groups, on the other hand, create suspicion, fear and insecurity by their tirade against Hindu religion and aggressive proselytism, leading some Hindus to view them as “conversion terrorists”. Fear is extraneous to true religion because the core of every religion is love. “There is no fear in love, perfect love casts out fear” (1Jn.4:18). To all who are afraid and terrorized Jesus says, “Do not be afraid” (Mt.1:20; Lk.1:30, Mt.28:5, Mk.16:6). Through his compassionate dealings with people of other religions Jesus took away their fear of freely approaching a Jewish Rabbi. He broke the walls of mistrust, segregation and drank with them the water of love and friendship (Jn.4:7) so that they, along with him, could worship the God of love “in spirit and truth” (Jn.4:23).

When Jesus announces the reign of God he is promising a life without fear. True religions do not threaten other religions. The Hindu Sastras state clearly: “*Dharma yo badhate dharmah, sa na dharmah kudharma tat*”<sup>17</sup> i.e. religion that blocks (*badhate*) other religions is no religion but irreligion. Every form of exclusivism that marginalizes other religions and their faith is anti-God because it denies God’s power to save and His impartial love for all humanity revealed in and through various cultures and religions. Christians in India today are called to follow their guru and cross the fences – physical, theological and psychological – that separate their Hindu neighbors from them.

## 2. *Owning Up Our ‘Punyabhumi’*

In the Hindutva discourse, a true Indian is one to whom this nation is *Pitrubhumi* and *Punyabhumi*. This is the criterion that Hindutva uses to exclude Christians from the mainstream.<sup>18</sup> A Christian response to this would be to claim and own up India as our *holy land*. What would this imply? It implies two things: First, this land with its

16 K.N. Panikkar, “Second Link in the Chain”, in *Frontline*, September 26, 2008 p.30

17 Quoted from: Dinkar, R.S, *Sanskriti Ke Char Adhyaya*, Patna: Udayachal, 1990, p.5

18 I am taking the difference between Hindutva and Hinduism for granted. Both are irreconcilable.

diverse cultures, religions and languages is as much “God’s own” and sacred as Palestine, Jerusalem or Rome. Secondly, it would also mean that we Christians own up and claim the culture, language and heritage of this land as our own, its heroes, sages, myths, scriptures and symbols as our own. The sacredness of our land, its culture and religions is bound up with the sacredness of every land. Geographical boundaries are human made. God made one earth. God asks humans to spread out and “fill the earth” (Gen.1:28) doing away with boundaries and frontiers. The Psalmist envisions a world where “people dwell as one” (Ps.133). The earth is one place where God is “all in all” (Sirach.43:28). It is from this one earth, made “sacred” by God’s omnipresence, that all nations, cultures and religions emerge and form one community (Vat II. NA.1).

God’s messengers are born in all lands and cultures. This land where Buddha and Mahavira, Vasishtha, Vyasa and Valmiki walked is sacred to us too, because they too are God’s messengers. The Upanishads and other traditions of India give witness to the experience of the sages who discovered the divine-human-cosmic unity in the cave of the heart. This advaita experience of the spiritual heritage of Indian sages leads us to the realization that “everyone united with the Lord becomes one Spirit with him” (1Cor.6:17). “At the level of this mystical experience Christians meet the sages and seekers of the Indian heritage...this is the deepest theosis-experience in the spiritual heritage of the Church.”<sup>19</sup>

Owning up this land as our *Punyabhumi* i.e. owning up our culture, our sages, our scriptures, symbols and spiritual tradition as “our own” is becoming increasingly difficult because the Church in India seems to be overwhelmed by a great fear: the fear of relativism leading to another fear, i.e. the loss of Christian identity. Michael Amaldoss rightly points out that such fears are unnecessary and unfounded: “Indians are heirs to two traditions: Indian and Christian. God has spoken not only to the Jews but also to our ancestors. While rooted in our faith we need not be afraid to allow interplay between two traditions.”<sup>20</sup> Further,

19 Painadath, S. *The Spiritual Journey*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2006, p.47

20 Forward, Vempeny Ishanand, *Raw Material for an Indian Theology*, Delhi: Media House, 2008, p.12



the essential identity that a true Christian needs to have is love. Hindu Christian relations can evolve positively when both Christians and Hindus are able to develop a pro-active affinity for the faith, values and symbols of each other.

### 3. *Proclaiming Without Provocation*

Aggressive Christian proclamation has led to a hate campaign by the Hindu nationalists who brand Christian missionaries as “conversion terrorists”. Proclaiming the Good News is a non-negotiable in Christian faith and practice. But proclaiming without threatening the other would greatly depend on what Jesus and what good news we proclaim. Deepak Chopra, the world renowned spiritual thinker speaks of a “threefold Jesus”. The first is the historical Jesus who lived 2000 years ago whose preaching forms the foundation of Christian faith. The second is the Jesus whom the missionaries brought and who represent a specific branch of religion. The third Jesus is the spiritual guide whose teachings embrace the whole humanity and with whose guidance we can create a future free from hatred that is fuelled by religious fundamentalism.<sup>21</sup>

Christian faith affirms that the ‘first Jesus’ and the ‘second Jesus’ are not separable from the “third Jesus”. However, the Church in India must make a choice as to which Jesus speaks to the Indian people most clearly today. The Jesus of the fundamentalist missionaries who threaten and denounce other religions will be rejected out right. In the Indian context of extreme poverty and religiosity, it is the “third Jesus” that the Indian people might take to heart without any fear. The third Jesus is the Jesus of all humanity who incarnates into all cultures and nations sanctifying, transforming and upholding them. The third Jesus would challenge structures that dehumanize, but not as a despot but along with all people of goodwill.

The Church in India is invited to be the salt, not a lump of salt causing distaste, but salt that dissolves. When the *religious ego* dissolves and vanishes, the Church would be able to proclaim the Good News that the people of this land would find truly *good news* to them.

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21 Chopra, Deepak, *The Third Jesus*, London: Rider, 2008, Back Cover

We could take a cue from St. Francis of Assisi: "Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary use even words!"

### Conclusion

We spoke of fears- Hindu fears and Christian fears, that undermine Hindu-Christian relations today. The Hindutva forces are in a relentless pursuit to demonize, disparage and discredit the Christians of this country through false propaganda and thereby instill fear and suspicion in the minds of the silent Hindu majority. Through violent attacks, threats and diatribes they have succeeded in creating panic and fear in the minds and hearts of Indian Christians. On the other hand, groups of Christian fundamentalists too have, through their fanatic and zealous missionary activities and calumnious utterance against Hindu religion, created suspicion, fear and insecurity in the minds of many Hindus. A Christian response to this rupturing Hindu-Christian relationship cannot be defensive or vengeful.

Inter-religious relationships can be promoted and nurtured only by entering the front yard of our religious neighbours and letting ourselves be invited into their homes and into their lives. This is the best way to feel at home in the house of our religious neighbour. Such openness will invariably lead us to the realization of all humans, no matter what religion they profess or culture they belong to, being members of a single family. Pope Benedict VI, in his recent encyclical "Caritas in Veritate" affirms: "The development of people depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family" (chapter, 5). The uniqueness and differences of each member (Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim etc) of this family needs to be appreciated, enjoyed and shared. In such a family relationship of Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains respecting every faith will not be a sterile duty but a festive delight.

Gyanoday,  
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Patna,

# **The Scope of Hindu-Christian Encounter Today**

**Anand Amaladass**

Anand Amaladass SJ, Professor at Satyanilayam, Chennai, describes the attempts made by Hindus and Christians to understand each other and to draw inspiration from the spiritual resources of the other. The ongoing encounter reaches out to spirituality and theology, art and architecture, popular devotions and religious symbols. An inter-Scriptural hermeneutics is evolving out of this creative encounter that enables Hindus and Christians to listen to the Spirit speaking through the other.

The Hindu-Christian relationship in India is historically rather ambivalent. At its best one can say that it is like oil and water and at its worst they are seen as rivals. With all the violent scenes of churches being burnt and Christians being attacked and driven away from home, as they were displayed in our media in the recent years, one wonders whether the Hindu-Christian dialogue has any scope at all in India. Pentecostal type of aggressive preaching and charismatic gatherings in large numbers are countered by Hindutva ideologues and Bajrangdal volunteers. The frog-in-the-well type of understanding of Christianity attempts to increase its number, but does not allow any scope for the others to make the same absolute claim for salvation. The Christians claim Christ to be centre of salvation, but resist when for instance the Hindus claim that the centre of salvation and of all other religions is to be seen in Krishna. The Hindus on the other hand do not want to concede that it kept millions of people out of the mainstream –



practically in the slums – in the name of caste etc., and any Christian initiative for social equality is seen as an effort to convert. On the other hand Christians themselves forget that the problems of the Christian dalits are no better. In that process both forget the gigantic problems affecting the life of the people as a whole.

Within this context we should place our question of Hindu-Christian encounter. Dialogue among people of good will has been taking place in India without much noise on the streets. India has been a land of dialogue, there is no doubt, but an encounter of another type has been happening all the time. I shall cite a few examples to show what is meant by this culture of dialogue.

What I mean here are the attempts made by the Christian and Hindu communities to understand and appreciate the other. There was no force on either side. But such attempts have made deep impacts in history. Just like the ocean that makes inroads into the rocky mountains, not by violence or force, but by constant rubbing against the nearby rocks with its dancing waves, gently but firmly, so also the Christian values are today part of the Hindu ethos and Hindu customs and ways of thinking have become Christian vocabulary down the centuries.

## **1. Hindu attempts in search of Christian world.**

### ***1.1. Hindus integrating Biblical Narratives with Hindu Scriptures.***

Many may not know that already in the 12th or 13th centuries the Hindu Chroniclers have absorbed certain Christian Scriptures and made them part of their Puranas. The *Bhavishyottapurana* which is dated between 8th and 12th centuries A.D., has long passages from the Bible. Pratisarga 1.4.18-60 relates the story of Adam and Eve, founders of Mlecchas, the eating of the fruit in the garden under the serpent's suggestion; Adam and Eve's sons and the Patriarchs until Noah; the construction of the ark and the deluge; the chapter ends with the prayer to Vishnumaya by Noah and people with him in the ark. Pratisarga 1.5.1-41 speaks of Noah's sons and the patriarchs. Although Moses is also explicitly named, the account is confined to the reproduction of the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis.

The *adhyaya* ends with a hint at the confusion of languages and with the spreading of the Mlecchas as far as India. *Bhavishya Purana* III.3.2.21-32 mentions a vision that the Emperor Salivahana had on the Himalaya, beyond a river. A son of God (*Ishaputra*) born of maiden (*kumari*) known as Ishamasiha appeared to him and proclaimed that he came to the Mleccha country to preach and establish the *dharma* among them and explained why he is called Mashiha. Such a narrative should be taken as an attempt of some Hindus to assimilate in their tradition all the values of the conquerors. Even though it was written by an individual, it has the right to be accepted in the *Bhavishya*, because it was an expression of the living tradition.<sup>1</sup>

## I. 2. Hindu Artists on Christian themes

Several Hindu artists have taken to Christian themes. Nandalal Bose (1882-1966) who was a student of Rabindranath Tagore and himself professor in Shantiniketan has painted Christ carrying the cross which is included among the 91 pieces exhibited at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi. Many Christian artists like Vinayak Masoji and Angelo da Fonseca, consider Bose as their guru. The theme of Christ was taken up by many writers of that time and that was the trend then. R.M.Roy, R. Tagore, K.C. Sen, P.C.Majoomdar and L.M. Tilak, saw in Christ a *Mahapurusha*, who identified himself with the suffering of humanity.

Another great artist of fame is Jamini Roy (1887-1972). He has seen the paintings of Christ by the Renaissance artists in the West, but he was not satisfied with them since they painted Christ in the existential situation of their time. But Roy wanted to show that the human and divine nature can be presented only through abstract and symbolic means. His *Last Supper*, *Mother and Child*, *Flight into Egypt* are some of his well-known works of art. Roy protested against the British suppression in India and the Western influence in all walks of life, but he returned to the Christian theme again and again. Christ was seen

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1 Cf. Giorgio Bonazzoli, Christ in the Bhavishya Purana (A Methodological Approach to Bha. P. III, 3.3.21-32. *Purana* 21 (1979), 23-39. J.J. Meyer, Moses and Zarathustra, Jesus and Muhammed in einem Purana. WZKM 42(1936), 1-18

as an ideal, as an Asian, as one of them who suffered for them. In His suffering is reflected the suffering of India.

Similar attempts have been made by several others like Upendra Maharathi (1908-1981), P.V. Janakiram (1930-1995), S. Dhanapal (1919-2000), K.C.S. Paniker (1911-1977), Nikhil Biswas (1930-1966), Vishwanath Nageshkar (1910-2001), Arup Das (1924-2004), Krishen Khanna (1925-), G. Raman (1942-) and A.V. Ilango (1950-). What made these Hindu artists take to Christian themes?<sup>2</sup> It is not certainly for commercial purpose nor is it just a fashion. They were genuinely interested in the person of Jesus and the message that the cross signified for them. Thus they created a culture of dialogue through their art works.

### 1. 3. *Hindu Thinkers Interpreting Christ.*

There are many examples of Hindus writing on Christ. Beginning with Ram Mohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen, who spoke about the cosmic Christ for the first time, we have records of many Hindu thinkers writing on Christ. Well-known are the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhi, Akhehananda Bharati among others. I want to cite just two recent publications by Hindu thinkers. One is *Yoga of the Christ*, A Hindu Reflection on the Gospel of John by Ravi Ravindra.<sup>3</sup> Ravindra wrote as a Hindu a commentary on St. John's Gospel; it has been translated into practically all European languages. The other is *Finding Jesus in Dharma. Christianity in India*, by Chatruvedi Badrinath.<sup>4</sup> He is highly critical about the missionary approaches to understand Christ, but well-informed and writes positively about Christ. The meaning of dharma as interpreted from the texts of Mahabharata by Badrinath, is fulfilled in Christ, as he writes. There are still many Hindus who have private devotion to Christ and some even write a column on Christian themes in the newspapers. For instance Dr. Mini

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2 For the detailed discussion see the forthcoming publication by Anand Amaladass and Gurdun Loewner, *Christian Theme In Indian Art*. Monohar Munshiram, Delhi, 2009

3 Ravi Ravindra, *Yoga of the Christ*, Element Books 1990

4 Chaturvedi Badrinath, *Finding Jesus in Dharma. Christianity in India*. ISPCK, Delhi 2004.

Krishna of Chennai has been writing in the *Hindu* or *Indian Express* for quite some time. I have with me a collection of her write-ups – some 20 of them – which are a Hindu way of understanding Christian themes or interpreting them in a way that appealed to several of the readers.<sup>5</sup>

#### ***1.4. Hindus visiting Christian shrines***

It is well-known that many Hindus visit even now the shrine of Mother Mary. They may identify Mary with one of their divinities in the Hindu pantheon. But they choose to come to a Christian church with devotion and one should not minimize this practice of many Hindus. Mother Mary becomes a source of inspiration and symbol of dialogue in the existential context, in spite of conflicts and flare-ups in some parts of the country. But the Christian leaders do not seem to take them seriously and make any dialogical provision for their presence in the Christian churches, but announce loudly that they are different and not part of us Catholics etc., which creates a distaste, *rasabhanga* as we say in Indian aesthetic context. But this is really the meeting-place of different religious identities, a *locus theologicus*, where Christian popular art is allowed to take the centre stage as for instance in the way Mother Mary is dressed differently in sari and jewelry befitting the place of worship, with elephant sculpture standing at the entrance (e.g. in Besant Nagar Velankanni shrine) like the bull in the shrine of Shiva etc. This phenomenon invites further reflection from the Christian circles.

### **II. Christian attempts to enter into the Hindu world**

#### ***II. 1. Christians sought the help of Hindu Pandits***

There has been an unrecognized form of dialogue between Hindu pandits and Christian Bible translators. It is clear that Hindu pandits had a major role in many of the Protestant translations of the Bible into Indian languages. There are records of the actual conversations in the midst of the translating process. Much credit is not given to the pandits in the missionary reports. The most striking use of brahmin

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5 Mini Krishnan, "The Seventh Petition – Forgiveness", in *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, June 2007, 462-464



assistants was in William Carey's ambitious project to translate and print the Bible in all the principal languages of the East. The work on the Marathi translation was done by Pandit Vaijanath with the Serampore missionaries serving as the editorial committee. The Hindu pandit Arumuga Navalar played a great role in the Tamil translation of the Bible as commissioned by Percival.<sup>6</sup>

## II. 2. *Christian encounter with Vedanta*

A few names among the Christian thinkers who were fascinated by the vedantic philosophy could be mentioned. It is difficult to fix the cut-out point in dealing with history. There is no need to present a historical survey of the Christian encounter with vedanta. One can begin with the seminal thinker from Bengal Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya (1861-1907). He was not alone in this venture. He comes in the footsteps of Keshub Chandra Sen and P.C. Mujumdar. Upadhyaya was emphatic that the Vedanta should be the philosophical basis on which an Indian Christian theological reflection should be built. He is remembered for making known the mystery of God as *saccidānanda*. Upadhyaya who was very much close to the Brahma Samaj and to Keshub Chandra Sen adopted the vision of *saccidānanda* as expressive of the Christian mystery of God as Trinity. Even now his hymn *Vande Saccidānandam* is sung in our churches.

At the beginning of 20th century there was a movement in Calcutta called "To Christ through the Vedanta" begun by the Jesuit Fathers of Calcutta. Notable among them are Pierre Johannis, Dandoy and others. But now under the inspiration of Fr. Richard De Smet, another friend of his, Theo De Greeff, compiled all the works of Pierre Johannis and brought them out in two volumes. This material was originally published as series of articles in 146 monthly articles between October 1922 and April 1934 by the Catholic Orphan Press, Calcutta.

Fr. Johannis' aim was to find a common way that leaves all to a universal harmony, born out of total self surrender: "to be nothing to oneself, in order to be all to God and the others." Fr. Johannis was one of those who was strongly influenced by the theological thought of the

6 John B. Carman, "Protestant Bible Translations in India: An Unrecognized Dialogue?", *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin* 4 (1991) 11-20

Indian Christian thinker Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya. This led him to study the vedanta with a due respect in his search for a natural foundation for the interpretation of the Christian faith in India. He was convinced that the truth was contained in a diffused manner in the various vedantic systems of thought. These truth components had to be brought together and synthesized. Hence the title: "To Christ through the Vedanta".

### II. 3. *Christian attempts at interpreting Hindu texts*

Several examples could be cited where Christian thinkers tried to interpret Hindu Scriptures. One example is that of Raimon Panikkar's attempt at interpreting Badarayana's Brahmasura 1.1.2. (*janmadyasya yatah*.- "Brahman is that from which the origin, etcetera of this world proceeds") in his *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*.<sup>7</sup> He calls it a philosophical dialogue. Panikkar is not talking about the Christ known to the Christians and unknown to the Hindus. He is talking about the Christ unknown to both. In this book Christ stands for the center of reality, that crystallization-point around which the human, the divine and the material can grow. This insight is developed further in his later work *A Christophany -the Fullness of Man*.<sup>8</sup>

Another recent example of Christian attempt to interpret Hindu Text is by Francis Clooney.<sup>9</sup> It is a Christian commentary for the Christians on the Hindu prayers like "Om obeisance to Narayana" (om namo narayanaya), "Having completely given up all dharmas to Me alone come for refuge (Carama Sloka 1st line) and "I approach for refuge the feet of Narayana with Sri. Obeisance to Narayana with Sri." Clooney writes, "there seems to me to be no reason why a Christian cannot still venture to appropriate the piety, theology and

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7 Raimon Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. Darton Longman & Tod, London, 1964, Revised version 1981.

8 Raimon Panikkar, *The Fullness of Man. A Christophany*. Orbis, New York, ISPCK, Delhi, 2006

9 Francis X. Clooney S.J., *The Truth, the Way, the Life. Christian Commentary on the Three Holy Mantras of the Srivaishnava Hindus*. Peeters Publisher, Leuven, 2008.

practice of the three mantras, as well as the insights and theology of Desika's *Essence*, for the sake of a deeply Christocentric manner of prayer. It is not that this careful reading and learning lead to a necessarily relativistic or even pluralistic theology. Indeed, a relativistic outcome would be ironic, given the highly confessional and focused perspective of both Christian and Srivaishnava prayer. Rather my hope is that a richer, gracious, reflective reality of and in faith is now seen in the perspective of Christ, heard through the prayerful exchanges that constitute the Mantras."<sup>10</sup>

Another attempt of the Christian thinkers was to compose prayers, treatises in Sanskrit to come closer to the Hindu elites perhaps. Sanskrit was also used to attack the religion of the Hindus as in the case of John Muir, but later changed his position in praise of Hinduism. This involved translating several well-known Christian hymns in Sanskrit like the *Magnificat*, *Te Deum*, in the epic *Srikhristasangita* etc. De Nobili is one of the pioneers in this field, later on John Muir, W. H. Mill, Brahmapadab Upadhyaya, among others.<sup>11</sup> This type of writing in Sanskrit has paved the way for the Christian community to coin terms to translate Christian message into Indian languages. Today many Hindu terms have become part of the Christian vocabulary. Phrases like Christian *yoga*, *Dharma* of Jesus, *Saccidananda* Ashram, Christian *advaita* etc. are used freely in the Christian circles, but the efforts of the pioneers in this field are not to be forgotten.

Many Christians were involved in translating Hindu scriptural and devotional texts into English, from Sanskrit, Tamil sources. I myself have translated into English Manavalammuni's commentary on Pillai Lokacarya's *Tattvatraya*.<sup>12</sup> Bhattar's *Abhiramai Antati*<sup>13</sup> and

10 Ibid. p.191

11 Cf. Anand Amaladass and Richard Fox Young, *The Indian Christiad, A Concise Anthology of Didactic and Devotional Literature in Early Church Sanskrit*. Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, India, 1995

12 *Tattvatrayavyakhyanam. Manavalammuni's Commentary on Pillai Lokacarya's Tattvatrayam*. Translated by Anand Amaladass. T. R. Publications for Satya Nilayam Publications, Chennai, 1995.

13 Anand Amaladass. *Die weibliche Dimension der Gottheit. Eine indische Perspektive*. Translated into German. Verlag Mueller-Speiser. Anif/Salzburg 2004.



Arunagiri Nathar's *Kantaranubhuti* and a selection of Tamil Siddhar Poems from Tamil into German. Some Hindu friends were happy about it and some Christian friends expressed their surprise of disapproval. Francis Clooney has translated into English three hymns on the Hindu Goddess and three hymns on Mother Mary in his recent publication.<sup>14</sup> There are many more instances of this type. In India many Christians - at least a great number of priests and nuns - started reading the Vedic hymns thanks to the translation of these hymns by Raimon Panikkar - *The Vedic Experience. Mantramanjari*.<sup>15</sup>

But one must look at this phenomenon in the context of our Indian renaissance in the 19th and 20th centuries. Several Indian thinkers who had the Western education were influenced through the translation works of the Indian texts from Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali. Thus the Western Orientalists and Indologists have contributed to the revival of Hinduism, from Neo-Hinduism leading to National Hinduism through their translation works. Vivekananda, Gandhi, Nehru, Tagore, Savarkar, Aurobindo, Ambedkar, Pipin Chandra Pal were all beneficiaries of the exposure to the West and they all quote ideas from Tolstoy, Thoreau, Marx, Lenin, Mussolini and Hitler, Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson, Edmond Burke, Gladston, Mill and Spencer - to mention just a few. The great reform movements in India are unthinkable without the influence of these thinkers.

## II. 4. *Christian attempts at integrating Hindu symbols and customs*

As the Hindu artists took to Christian themes for painting and sculpture, Christian artists have taken to Hindu themes to express their Christian message. The dance of Shiva is seen as the best way to express the joy of resurrection and so the Risen Jesus is portrayed by Jyoti Sahi in a dance pose. Hindu mandala is adapted by several Christian artists like Jyoti Sahi, Lucy D'Souza. The National Biblical

14 Francis X. Clooney, *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother. Hindu Goddesses and the Virgin Mary*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005

15 Raimon Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience. Mantramanjari. An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration.*(1977), Motilal Banarsidass Delhi 1994.

Catechetical Centre in Bangalore has used the Hindu symbols to adorn its window panels and grills besides their Saccidananda chapel for prayer and meditation. The earliest example of an Indianized Church in Hindu architectural style is the Christukula Ashram chapel in Tiruppattur in Tamilnadu by S. Jesudasan and Forrester Paton completed in 1933. There is a highly decorated *gopuram* (gate-tower) and a *vimana* (raised cover for the sanctuary) taken from the Dravidian temple style. Much use is made in the carvings on the pillar-capitals and elsewhere of traditional religious symbols: e.g. Bunches of plantains hanging from a tree with the flower at the end, symbolizing Christian life and joy.

## II. 5. *Christian Missionaries at the feet of the Hindu masters*

It is fitting to mention here Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux) (1910-1973) whose birth centenary is being planned for celebration from December 2009. He is a unique example of being initiated by the Hindu Master like Ramana Maharishi. In January 1949 Abhishiktananda visited Ramana and says that "this stay at Thiruvannamalai was at once a retreat and an initiation into Indian monastic life." Having come to India to bear witness to Christ, he finds himself like so many others before and after him, converted by those whom he sought to convert - in the deepest sense of the word: "I came here to make you known to my Hindu brothers. But it is you who have made yourself known to me thanks to them in the intoxicated features of Arunachala", as he wrote in November 1956. He writes in his *Guhantara* appealing to Christ: "O my Beloved, in order to give me your grace, why have you hidden yourself beneath the lineaments of Shiva, of Arunachala. of Ramana, the Rishi and of the naked wanderer Sadashiva? Is this all your divine sport? You assume every form as you play with us, for it is your wish that we should seek you beyond all forms."<sup>16</sup>

Ramana died in 1950 but Abhishiktananda continued to visit Thiruvannamalai several times. In December 1955 was his last visit to Arunachala. Then he met for the first time Swami Gnanananda who

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16 Quoted by Odette Baumer-Despeigne, in her Introduction to *The Secret of Arunachala* by Abhishiktananda, ISPCK, 1979, p. x.

eventually became his guru. Abhishiktananda spent three weeks at the beginning of 1956 in Tirukoyilur at the feet of this guru. Later he wrote a book on this encounter in which he says: "India only reveals herself to those who are prepared to be still and over a long period of time to listen humbly at close quarters to the beating of her heart".<sup>17</sup>

### III. Concluding remarks

These examples are only pointers to the great epiphany that is happening in the Hindu-Christian encounters. These attempts delineated above have brought about great changes in both the communities, though it is not measurable in quantitative terms, but perceptible in terms of attitudes. The Christian presence in India is not to be perceived in terms of numbers, but in terms of its vibrant presence; not what the Christian *preachers* proclaim, but what the Hindu partners in dialogue have understood and come out in their own way to express in public forum. The Christian community needs to listen to what the Hindu partners in dialogue are saying about Christ and about themselves. There is a recent publication on Indian art<sup>18</sup> in which there is a chapter entitled *The Last Supper*, where several artists, who have painted *The Last Supper*, are presented – by Jamini Roy, Newton Souza, Krishen Khanna, M.F. Husain, A. Ramchandran and others. *The Last Supper* has become an accepted vocabulary in the Indian art history which is only a pointer to a larger horizon of Christian presence.

To quote another example is the work I did on the dhvani theory of Anandavardhana in Indian aesthetics as an exegetical method of interpreting scriptures. And this created some interest among the biblical scholars and one issue of *Biblehashyam* was devoted to the dhvani way of interpreting scripture.<sup>19</sup> I have also been teaching at the Biblical Institute, St. Peter's Seminary, Bangalore for the last sixteen

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17 Abhishiktananda, *Guru and Disciple. An Encounter with Sri Gnananada*, a contemporary spiritual master. ISPCK, 1990

18 Cf. Yashodhara Dalmia, *The Making of Modern Indian Art. The Progressives*. OUP, New Delhi, 2001. Chapter 10, The Last Supper, pp, 203-228

19 Dhvani Interpretation of the Bible. *Biblehashyam*. December 1979

years on the Indian exegesis and for this course I prepared a textbook on the Hindu-Buddhist hermeneutics.<sup>20</sup> For the last 20 years I have been part of the project of running the *Journal of Hindu Christian Studies* as co-editor from 1988 to 2007, the only journal in the whole world exclusively devoted to the Hindu-Christian encounter. The Hindu and Christian scholars have been writing in this Journal.

These are small initiatives to bring the Christians and the Hindus closer, to get to know each other's way of thinking. This sort of dialogue will be limited to a few, but they will have deep impact in the creation and sustenance of the culture of dialogue, removing age-old prejudices and creating a climate of acceptance. It might sound odd for some, since not many could afford this type of dialogue, which requires facilities to travel, having access to libraries, leisure, besides commitment to scholarly work.

Is it a luxury meant for the elite? Francis Clooney answers this question from his own experience. He has been researching, among many other themes, on *Tiruvaymoli* of Nammalvar and its various commentaries with the help of Srivaishnava scholars in Chennai and he calls this kind of Hindu Christian studies as a necessary luxury in the context of today's pluralism.<sup>21</sup> He sums up his arguments as follows: "To regard these studies as a necessary luxury is to insist on the value of research and reflection as integral to the completion of the most important human endeavours, as such studies give a form and voice to what is going on around us; it is to insist that the reasonable and prudent boundaries of one's faith are there to be transgressed; it is to venture to preserve and protect one's faith by forever seeking what is outside it, by forever inviting outsiders in; it is sharing what one has – money, time, home, ideas, hopes: and all of this when one does not have to, when it is a luxury."

The main precondition for dialogue today is to free oneself from the conqueror's attitude. The Christian theology of mission emphasizes

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20 Anand Amaladass, *Indian Exegesis. Hindu-Buddhist Hermeneutics*, Satya Nilayam Publications, Chennai, 2003.

21 Francis Clooney, "Hindu-Christian Studies as a Necessary Luxury in the Context of Today's Pluralism", in *Hindu Christian Studies Bulletin* 7 (1994) 39-44



that the mission belongs to God and not to the Church. The Church is seen as an instrument, a sign, a symbol of the mission and not its origin. One should be ready to accept the limits of tolerance. The mutual relation of the golden rule is "do to others what you would have them done to you". That means, even if the Christians maintain that the Hindus need to be converted, they should still respect the Hindu identity. The purpose of inter-religious dialogue is not to find a neutral language, to find a common demarcation line. It is much more to create space for the freedom of the other, to respect their identity, to recognize and to appreciate how the Spirit is at work in other religious traditions.

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# **Coming in Touch with another Belief-Tradition**

## **Discovering the Presuppositions of a different Culture and Widening the Horizons of our own**

**Francis X. D'Sa**

Francis X. D'Sa SJ, Professor (em.) of Jnanadeepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, examines the inherent dynamics of inter-cultural and inter-religious encounters. He makes it clear that a creative encounter between Christianity and Hinduism has to respect the anthropic cosmovision of Christianity and the karmic cosmovision of Hinduism. He describes their deep divergences and points to the scope of a creative encounter between these two religious heritages. He shows that a fruitful theological reflection on the Cosmic Christ could draw much inspiration from the karmic cosmovision attuned to the Indian psyche. As a test case he reflects of the meaning of Yajna and that of the Eucharist in the Indian context.

### **0. Introduction**

Years back when we began reflecting on the enterprise of inculturation there was a facile presupposition that we (especially theologians) needed to adjust and adapt the expressions of our Christian experience in a multireligious context so that believers from the neighbouring traditions would understand us more authentically. It is only gradually that we have come to realize that the solution lies in listening more minutely to the phenomenon of interaction between cultures. Therein the limits of our world of beliefs are exposed. While it is true of all traditions that the expressions of their respective faith-

experience have to become mutually intelligible in the multicultural and historical context of the times, what is of help in this task is a closer look at the dynamics of such an encounter itself.

To those working seriously for long years with another religio-cultural tradition it is clear that the tradition of another belief-world which one researches is to a great extent unintelligible in one's own belief-world. When Hindus, for example, speak of *Svarga* ("heaven" in the standard English translations) this is indeed vastly different from (but neither better nor worse than) what Christian belief calls heaven. Furthermore one is aware that *Svarga* is not a solitary belief, a sort of belief-island; it is part of a larger family of beliefs which hang together. The truth is that the Hindu world of belief is very different from the Christian world of belief. It must indeed be a rare researcher who like the proverbial lotus remains untouched by this conclusion.<sup>1</sup> The following article intends to sketch out, from the viewpoint of the present writer, an important insight: the fruit of the interaction between two cosmovisions about a different understanding of history in the Hindu belief-world which is here called *karmic*.

### 0.1 The Belief-World of Christians

What is striking in the Christian beliefs (of the judeo-graeco-roman tradition) is that they make sense on the background of an *anthropic cosmovision*. The major metaphor of this cosmovision is the Anthropos which colours everything. It is the centre on which everything intelligible hangs together in this universe of meaning. Whatever is perceived is filtered through *anthropic* glasses as it were. The expression "anthropic glasses" refers to the parameters within which understanding in that world takes place. These are constituted by *whatever affects mainly*

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1 Even a great scholar like R.C. Zaehner who undoubtedly was aware of the differences between the two belief-worlds seemed to forget this when rendering Krishna's *Avatars* as the *Incarnations* of Krishna in his now classical translation: *The Bhagavadgita* with a commentary based on the original sources (Oxford University Press, London/Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1966). Similarly on the Hindu side we have the astute Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan who in his translation of the Bhagavadgita translates *Brahman* in the Gita with *God*! See his *The Bhagavadgita* with an introductory essay, Sanskrit Text, English Translation and Notes (London: George Allen etc., 1948).

*the Anthropos*, who is endowed with freedom and responsibility. Anthropos is the way one looks at history and salvation history because only events, not happenings, constitute the warp and woof of history. These are associated with what affects Man<sup>2</sup>, and have to do with the way one approaches God as *Abba/Father*, the Trinity as three *persons*, Man as *child* of God, sin as *disobedience*, the Devil as *person* (!), heaven as beatic *vision*, hell as eternal *damnation*, revelation as Divine *Word* which is handed down as *scripture*, etc., etc. Last but not least the *final judgement* is also an anthropic way of imagining the event where the definitive fate of individual persons becomes clear. In this belief-world time is taken to be almost<sup>3</sup> linear and *events* are unique and *happenings* are secondary. Man's time in the world of history is once and for all, and so there is place in it neither for recurrence nor for rebirth. Finally the Cosmos appears to be merely the stage on which history and salvation history are played out; and the stage is not part of the plot! Love is the path to freedom and ultimate bliss.

The traditional Christian beliefs (however interpreted and reinterpreted down the centuries) belong within this anthropic world; they cannot be extrapolated without serious qualifications. Outside this cosmovision they are irrelevant at best and not understood or misunderstood at worst.

The writing of history in the secular sphere of the western cosmovision is also based on the anthropic understanding of history. Understandably Indian historians too presuppose this approach in their writings because they too are interested in *events*.<sup>4</sup>

## 0.2 The Belief-World of Hindus

In severe contrast to the anthropic world we have the *karmic* world

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- 2 Following Raimon Panikkar I employ in the *Bhagavadgita* Man only to refer to one of the three centres of Reality, the other two being God and World.
  - 3 "Almost linear" because whatever the nuances in the anthropic understanding of time, there is, I suspect, in all the interpretations of time a beginning for time (like creation) and a final goal (like the end of time, of the world, of history) which is eternity!
  - 4 See, e.g., Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Bourgeois Categories made Global: Utopian and Actual Lives of Historical Documents in India", *Economical and Political Weekly*, (June 20, 2009), 67-75.



of the Hindus. The expression *karmic* is significant in this context because here the interconnected complex of karmic relationships is the hermeneutic key that makes understanding possible. On this landscape Man has no special significance except as part and parcel of the interconnected complex of cosmic relationships. The total whole is a complex of interrelated happenings; there is no place in this complex for an isolated, unrelated happening; no place for special events because no happening is more important or more significant than the others. Unlike in the anthropic world where everything significant is *personalistically* coloured, here everything is *cosmically* connected whether likes or dislikes (the two most important forces that clouding perception and understanding drag one down the path of birth-and-rebirth) or ignorance (or non-recognition) of the real nature of the Self or its relationship to the Absolute, the Nameless Mystery that is addressed by a thousand-and-one-names.

Where blindness to reality reigns neither free-will nor sinful choices are relevant. Hence spirituality occupies centre-stage, not morality. Consequently definitive liberation is ultimately possible through enlightenment, aided sometimes by love and service. The significance of revelation is ubiquitous but its actual role in life is minimal. Probably because the presence and power of liberation is embodied not in a historical person but in the whole of the universe. And for all Hindu schools, detachment (or renunciation) is of the essence.

### 1. The Karmic View of History

In the course of my academic life I have been left with no doubt that Anthropologists, Historians, Indologists, Philosophers, Sociologists, Theologians, etc. have all taken for granted that history *always* refers to the western perspective of history. Except in Raimon Panikkar's<sup>5</sup> writings, this has been the dominant approach to history, neglecting (or overlooking the perspectives of other cultures and traditions. My work with the Hindu traditions has gradually made me aware that in them

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5 More specifically I refer to Panikkar's seminal contribution, „The Law of *Karman* and the Historical Dimension of Man“, in: *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics. Cross-Cultural Studies* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1978) [Indian edition: Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1983], 361-388.

another understanding of history is at work – an understanding which I have called *karmic*.<sup>6</sup> This understanding of history is important when dealing with religious texts of the Hindu traditions.

Years ago E.C. Carr presented a brief but brilliant statement of the western approach to history.<sup>7</sup> Carr's presentation remains classic. It hits the nail on the head when it points out that not every *happening* becomes an event; and only *events* go into the making of what is called history. Construction of historical interpretations takes only events into account. Events are those happenings which are significant for Man, the Anthropos. This western approach is concerned with constructing a narrative which brings out the significance of events for Man. Not every happening is a historical event but only that which is somehow related to the destiny of Man.

Now contrast this with the karmic understanding of history where every happening is part and parcel of karmic history. No happening is an island; on the contrary every happening is part of the historical texture where past, present and future are related to and interrelated with one another. Here no happening is more significant or less significant than the others. Hence there is no question of focusing on events in order to construct historically significant patterns of interpretation. The primary Hindu concern in the world is not with interpreting (or reinterpreting) history but with emancipation from the spiral of birth-and-rebirth called *Samsara*. For the believer in *Samsara* the ultimate goal is definitive liberation, that is, getting out of this existential spiral.

It is not only the differences between the cosmovisions which are of relevance to us but more especially their implications. First of all, the differences in their cosmovisions are a clear warning to avoid interpreting them through the glasses of one's culture because misinterpretations are bound to arise. Cultures are different in big ways

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6 For a somewhat greater elaboration see my "Anthropische und Karmische Geschichte", in: *Regenbogen der Offenbarung. Das Universum des Glaubens und das Pluriversum der Bekenntnisse* (Frankfurt/M & London: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 2006), 63-86.

7 E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (Pelican Reprint, 1974).

and small. Secondly, the main difference between diverse cultures is primarily to be located in their different approaches to reality and truth. Thirdly, there arises the question of communication between the cultures. Fourthly, this opens up a new kind of discourse about the nature of a culture's reception of truth and reality which in turn raises questions like: Can one culture's understanding of reality and truth be normative for other cultures? Does a positive answer to this question not lead to relativism?

The first point has to do with understanding other cultures. Whatever our stance in this regard, looking at other cultures through the glasses of our cosmovision cannot be the solution.<sup>8</sup> To do this would be to misunderstand the other cultures and to distort their meaning. That diverse cultures approach truth and reality differently can hardly be overlooked today. For the dominant western culture this is a hard saying. To say the least, this is startling for the protagonists of the western view of history, who do not appear to be allergic to the history of political and cultural colonialism.<sup>9</sup>

Secondly our discussion will have shown that there are major differences between the anthropic and karmic approaches to history that have to be thematized and taken seriously. In the anthropic world if something has not taken place in history, then it is considered to be a figment of the imagination, that is, it is not true. In this scheme it is *historical* truth that confirms its reality. Hence history, that is, what really happened, is an important characteristic of truth and reality. That Jesus really lived and died is (rightly) an important truth for the Christian traditions living in the anthropic approach to history.

8 Already in 1962 the eminent sociologist A.K.Saran questioned the legitimacy of L. Dumont's enterprise of an external view. As Veena Das puts it: "He [Saran] argued here that Dumont's claim for an external view of Indian society which was more objective than internal held a positivist trap. An external view, Saran said, is nothing other than an *interpretation of one culture through the categories of another, alien culture.*" (My emphasis) See Veena Das, *Critical Events. An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Oxford 2003), 31.

9 See Panikkar's *Cultural Disarmament. The Way to Peace* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

In the karmic world, on the other hand, nothing is unique and everything is repeatable, even the descent of the Divine in this world (*avatara*). This is so because here truth is primarily ontological truth that is independent of history. An instance of this is Krishna's existence which is *in* history but not *of* history. As Gandhiji once said, even if scholars were to prove one day that, historically speaking, Krishna did not exist that would not go against the Hindu belief in Krishna's existence. The truth of Krishna's existence does not belong to the realm of history.<sup>10</sup> Anthropic history is not the only measure of truth.

The anthropic and the karmic perspectives are two very different approaches to truth and reality. But there is no convincing argument to uphold the superiority of either of them. Any argument from within one's own tradition that extrapolates its normativeness to other belief-worlds will not be valid. Incidentally all traditions are in danger of making similar claims – of course each in its own way. Radhakrishnan, for instance, speaks for Hinduism thus: Hinduism is not a religion but the mother of all religions!

Thirdly, there is the difficult question of communication between such very different cultures. Here we have the general answer of hermeneuticians who say that in order to understand the other, one has to enter the world of the other. This is equally true of other traditions. One has to enter the world of the tradition that one wishes to understand. In this regard Raimon Panikkar has suggested the path of diatopical hermeneutics<sup>11</sup> by means of which one discovers "homeomorphic or functional equivalents"<sup>12</sup> between the two worlds. Diatopical hermeneutics tries to relate diverse cultural universes like the Hindu and the Christian universes. The functional equivalents relate similar functions of different universes of meaning. What Yahweh is to the believing Jews Allah is to the believing Muslims! However functional

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10 Jug Suraiya, "Is Ram really for real?", *Times of India*, Tuesday July 14, 2009.

11 See Panikkar's *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 9-10.

12 See Bernard Nitsche, "Homeomorphic Equivalents as 'Chances of Interreligious Understanding'" in: Kala Acharya/Milena Carrara Pavan (Eds.), *Raimon Panikkar. His Legacy and Vision* (Mumbai/New Delhi: Somaiya Publications, 2008), 167-180.



equivalents do not state that Jahwe is Allah but they point to the similarity of the significance of their functions in their respective universes of meaning. I have made good use of diatopical hermeneutics in my work<sup>13</sup> because it helps steer clear between the Scylla of reductionism and the Charybdis of relativism. Diatopical hermeneutics does justice to the uniqueness of a cosmovision; at the same time it avoids absolutizing it.

Fourthly, all this opens up an altogether different discourse, namely, the discussion about absolute Truth and its historical reception. No historical claim to truth can be absolute. The normativeness of a claim to truth is valid only within its own belief-world. This is what Panikkar has called relationality or relativity. Relationality refers to the relationship with its belief-world; similarly relativity refers to the related nature of the truth of a belief. Though the validity of truth is without limits, the validity of its reception is limited only to the world of its beliefs. Truth is received from within a specific belief-world which is historically conditioned. This sets limits to the reception of the truth.<sup>14</sup>

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13 See, for example, my "Christian Eucharist and Hindu Yajña", in: Kurien Kunnumpuram (Ed.), *The Eucharist and Life. Indian Christian Reflections on the Lord's Supper* (Mumbai: St Pauls, 2007), 55-283. Similarly on a wide variety of topics in my *Gott, der Dreieine und der All-Ganze. Vorwort zur Begegnung zwischen Christentum und Hinduismus* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1987) and *Regenbogen der Offenbarung. Das Universum des Glaubens und das Pluriversum der Bekenntnisse*.

14 For Panikkar „the relationship between truth and the expression of truth in concepts and symbols is one of the most central philosophical problems. Truth has the inbuilt claim to be universally valid, here and there, yesterday and tomorrow, for you and for me. Yet my grasping and formulating it cannot sustain the same claim without charging all the others who do not agree with me with stupidity or wickedness. Hence the necessary via media between agnostic relativism and dogmatic absolutism. This is what can be called relativity...Our particular case is a typical example of the pars pro toto: from the optic of the inside it looks like the whole; from the outside it looks like a part, a fragment...Here lies the crux. We cannot but aim at the totum, and yet we often forget that all we see is the pars which we then take pro toto...In brief, we need a new hermeneutic: the diatopical hermeneutic that can only be developed in a dialogical dialogue. This would show us that we must take neither the pars pro toto, nor believe that we see the totum in parte. We must accept what our partner tells us: simply that we take the totum pro parte, when we are aware of the pars pro toto; which is

Does such a stance lead to relativism? Relativism denies or is indifferent to the existence of absolute truth but relationality and relativity do not share in this attitude. On the contrary they take absolute truth for granted. Relationality stresses the relationship of its truth-experience to absolute truth within its belief-world and relativity focuses on the relative nature of the historical reception of absolute truth. That is why accepting the relative validity of a religious tradition does not lead to relativism. Relativism is a victim of intellectual laziness. Its reasoning is based exclusively on reason, naively believing that reason can “explain” and “prove” everything. It shows little or no interest in exploring the nature of the world of beliefs which is different from the world of perception. Relativism has no *locus standi* in a world of beliefs.

The conclusion is obvious: Given Man’s historical conditioning human language receives absolute truth relatively. On the other hand, truth can be true only because of its participation in absolute truth. Furthermore there is a great difference between the dynamics of religious language, or more precisely, the dynamics of the language of belief and the language of perception. In the former faith is an essential ingredient, not so in the latter. Faith *knows* the depth-dimension but reason *knows about* the depth-dimension of reality. Faith is the openness of one’s being to the depth-dimension.<sup>15</sup> Being refers here to its constituent realms: body, mind and spirit. When real faith (and not belief) enters the scene the view is holistic; there is a continuum between faith and reason, “a fundamental harmony between the knowledge of faith and the knowledge of philosophy”, as the Encyclical *Fides et ratio* (1998) puts it<sup>16</sup>.

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obviously what we will retort right back to him. This is the human condition and I would not consider it to be an imperfection.” In: *Inter-Culture* XVII.1.82 (Jan-Mar. 1984), 37-38.

15 Panikkar, „Faith as a Constitutive Human Dimension“, in: *Myth, Faith & Hermeneutics*, 188-239 and his, “Faith and Belief: A multireligious Experience”, in: *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press 1999, revised edition), 41-59.

16 *Fides et ratio*, §42.

## 2. The Implications of the Differences between the Cosmovisions

The difference, for example, between the Hindu and the Christian cosmovisions should give us pause to think on different levels.

No religion, no culture is superior or inferior. They are all different, each with its own specific characteristics. A religion is irreducible to another religion and therefore to be understood on its own terms. That is why it won't do to study the other merely from one's own perspective. Thus to evaluate the Christian tradition from the perspective of the Hindu tradition or vice versa would be a methodological mistake. Arguably this is a difficult enterprise because it goes against the grain both to listen to the other tradition and its experience of truth as well as "to go out of one's tradition" to the other shore as it were and experience the other tradition. The first has to do with dialogue and the second with experience.<sup>17</sup>

This does not require that one should give up one's convictions, say, about one's anthropic understanding of history. It only means that one needs to remember that others too have their own convictions, say, about their karmic understanding of history which one cannot expect them to give up. This is the challenging aspect of the dialogue of religions. As John Paul II puts it in his encyclical *Redemptoris missio*:

„Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church: they stimulate her both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ's presence and of the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all.“<sup>18</sup>

We in India have developed our theologies, especially our Christologies, our theologies of the Trinity, of mission and dialogue, of peace, justice and liberation, of the last things, etc., almost exclusively on the backdrop of anthropic history. Westerners will more easily understand us than our own people in India. This is because we have failed to develop all these themes also in the world of karmic history.

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17 See footnote 12 above.

18 *Redemptoris missio* §59.

Everybody from pope to parish priest harangues us on our duty to thematize and proclaim the Good News but nobody seems to be aware that *our* good news comes couched in the language of the religious worlds of the Jews, Greeks and Romans (to highlight only the main cultures) – a language that is at the root of all misunderstandings because to a great extent it is unintelligible to believers from the Indian religions! *Redemptoris missio* reminds that “The Spirit manifests himself in a special way in the Church and in her members. Nevertheless, *his presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time*” (§28) and that it is the Spirit who “*leads us to broaden our vision in order to ponder his activity in every time and place*” (§29). (My emphasis)

The reason why the other religions pose a positive challenge to the Church is because “they stimulate her both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ’s presence and of the working of the Spirit”. *Redemptoris missio* has formulated for us who are studying other religions a mission statement which delineates our task unambiguously. In our research and study of the Hindu traditions we are constantly confronted by “the signs of Christ’s presence and of the working of the Spirit” in the karmic cosmovision and we realize how very different they are from “the signs of Christ’s presence and of the working of the Spirit” in the anthropic cosmovision! It seems to me that *Redemptoris missio* rubs in this point by asserting the following (§29):

“Thus the Spirit, who ‘blows where he wills’ (cf. Jn 3:8), who ‘was already at work in the world *before* Christ was glorified,’ and who ‘has filled the world,...holds all things together [and] knows what is said’ (Wis 1:7), leads us to broaden our vision in order to ponder his activity in every time and place.” (My emphasis)

This official Christian understanding of other religions leads us to conclude that since creation the Spirit is active in every time and space - not only in the anthropic cosmovision but also in the karmic cosmovision! The Church is stimulated – ultimately by the Spirit – to “discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ’s presence and of the working of the Spirit” in the other cultures and religions!

The Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (§21) states that “experts in sacred and secular disciplines have important roles to play in the process of inculturation”. It goes on to add (§22):



“The Synod expressed encouragement to theologians in their delicate work of developing an inculturated theology, especially in the area of Christology. They noted that ‘this theologizing is to be carried out with courage, in faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Church’s Tradition, in sincere adherence to the Magisterium and with an awareness of pastoral realities’.”<sup>19</sup>

Unless we take our local cultures seriously there is no chance of discovering in them the signs of Christ’s presence and of the working of the Spirit. Our Christologies will turn out to be *Indian* in intention only. They will stress exclusively those concerns which Paul has made classic, namely, “Christ and him crucified”. For the majority of believers in India for whom suffering has no salvific significance whatever and birth-and-rebirth in Samsara is the thing most to be feared, this aspect of the Christ may evoke admiration but will not be of much help to get out of Samsara! It is to them that a Christ has to be preached who makes sense in their Samsaric situation. If Christ has to make sense to believers like these then it has to be a Christ who is not limited to Christ crucified!<sup>20</sup>

But, one may object, does this not smack of colonialism, making Christ the absolute norm for all religions and thus bringing in through the backdoor the superiority of the Christian Religion? <sup>21</sup>

19 It might be unrealistic of theologians to expect in day to day life the kind of encouragement expressed here.

20 See my “Continuity and Change. The Task of Contextualizing Theology in India Today”, *Jnanadeepa. Pune Journal of Religious Studies* 12:1 & 2 (2009), 8-29.

21 Repeatedly Panikkar has been drawing attention to the ancient belief of the Church that: “Jesus is Christ, but Christ cannot be identified completely with Jesus of Nazareth.” See his *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* (Maryknoll/ New York: Orbis Books), 150. This is so because “Christians do not possess an exhaustive knowledge of Christ”. Furthermore, “the figure of Christ has been forged almost exclusively in dialogue with the Mediterranean cultures”. In dialogue with Syrians, Persians, Ethiopians, Greeks, Romans, and even “barbarians” they worked out an answer. After that “they ceased referring to the other civilizations”. “They did not imitate their Teacher by asking once again, ‘Who do the people’ – the Buddhists, the Hindus, the Africans – ‘say the son of man is?’” Ibid. 11: “Christology has been, in general, a reflection pursued by Christians who except in its first period of its formation, have virtually ignored the world’s

The answer is no, because:

“From the Christian perspective the Christ, the Logos, is the meeting-point of all, all religions and all traditions. The eternal Christ or the Logos who is more than the historical Jesus has revealed himself not only in Jesus but also in the other religions and in the whole of creation though differently. We Christians have come to know the Christ through Jesus; the others through their specific revelation. This is not to imply that Allah, Buddha, Krishna are the same as Christ or that the difference between all of them is only in a difference in name. When Christians experience the Mystery in a specific manner in Jesus, they speak of the Christ and refer this to a specific perspective of understanding history and salvation history. When others experience the Mystery in their specific manner they too have their own specific name which also refers to their perspective of salvation (however each may name this goal). Each tradition experiences the Mystery in its own specific manner.”<sup>22</sup>

The Ineffable Mystery that is at the source of all revelation, the Christians call the Christ<sup>23</sup> but the other traditions who have their own

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other traditions. Christophany, on the other hand, is open to both a dialogue with other religions and an interpretation of that same tradition on the basis of a scenario that embraces the past (including the pre-Christian) as well as the present (even what is called the non-Christian, including the secular).“ And ibid. 162: “If Jesus of Nazareth were not a historical personage, he would lose all his reality...Christophany does not contest the historicity of Jesus. It merely affirms that history is not the only dimension of the real and that Christ’s reality is thus not exhausted with Jesus’ historicity...Christophany’s transcendence of historical Christology belongs to the cultural moment in which we live.”

22 See my “Continuity and Change. The Task of Contextualizing Theology in India Today”, *Jnanadeepa. Pune Journal of Religious Studies* 12:1 & 2 (2009), 8-29.

23 Michael Amaladoss, „The Trinity on Mission“, in: Frans Wijsen & Peter Nissen (Hrsg.), *‘Mission is a Must’*. Intercultural Theology and the Mission of the Church (Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2002), 106:

To preserve the unity of the Trinity on the one hand, to affirm a certain articulation between the mission of God and of Jesus on the other, Indian theologians point to a distinction between the Word and Jesus. Jesus is the historical, incarnate manifestation of the Word. But his activity is not coextensive with the activity of the Word as such. Whatever Jesus does, the Word of God does because Jesus is the incarnate Word. But the presence and action of the

revelation-traditions call by names that are specific to them. They reveal as aspect of the Christ that is specific to them. What is revealed in each of the traditions has to be shared through dialogue so that a fuller, more holistic picture of this Mystery emerges.

Something of this dream is tangible in Keshub Chunder Sen's (1838-1884) extraordinary lecture "That marvellous Mystery - The Trinity".<sup>24</sup> We can now conclude our discussion of the two belief-worlds with their specific understanding of history with an extraordinary quotation from this lecture wherein a Christology is at work that clearly presupposes a karmic understanding of history:

"Mark the length and breadth, the height and depth of the true Christ, the all-inclusive, the all-comprehending Christ. Large as the Logos, wide as the World, deep as divine humanity, who can measure, who can fathom this Christ?" (31)

"Wherever there is intelligence, in all stages of life, where there is the least spark of instinct, there dwells Christ, if Christ is the Logos. In this right and rational view do not the Fathers all agree? Do they not speak of an all-pervading Christ? Do they not bear unequivocal testimony to Christ in Socrates? Even in barbarian philosophy and in all Hellenic literature they saw and adored their Logos-Christ. In the midst of this large assembly I deny and repudiate the little Christ of popular theology, and stand up for a greater Christ, a fuller Christ, a more eternal Christ, a more universal Christ. I plead, for the eternal Logos of the Fathers, and I challenge the world's assent. This is the Christ who was in Greece and Rome, in Egypt and India. In the bards and the poets of the Rig Veda was he. He dwelt in Confucius and in Sakya Muni. This is the true Christ whom I can see everywhere, in all lands and in all times, in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, in America, in

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Word is not limited to its manifestation in Jesus. Such a distinction makes it possible to distinguish the action of God, the Father, the Word and the Spirit in the world and in history from the action of Jesus in and through the Church, and not reduce one to the other. The presence and action of Jesus in and through the Church then can relate creatively to the presence and action of God in other religions as well as in human, 'secular' history as such.

24 *Keshub Chunder Sen's Lectures* (London, etc.: Cassel, 1904), 1-48.

ancient and modern times. He is not the monopoly of any nation or creed. All literature, all science, all philosophy, every doctrine that is true, every form of righteousness, every virtue that belongs to the Son, is the true subjective Christ whom all ages glorify.”(32)

“Scattered in all schools of philosophy and in all religious sects, scattered in all men and women of the East and the West, are multitudinous Christ-principles, and fragments of Christ-life: one vast and identical Sonship diversely manifested. The one ideal Christ manifest in multiform concrete little Christs. Sum up all that is true and good and beautiful in the life of humanity, and you have the grand Logos of the early Christians, the Christ of Universal Theism. Thus all reason in man is Christ-reason, all love is Christ-love, and all power is Christ-power. In this sense we are all Christ’s, one and all. Let not India deny this. My countrymen, there is nothing in such a confession of which ye need be ashamed. I commend to you not the little Christ of little Christian sects, but the grand Christ of universal humanity, the perfect Man, the ideal Son, that was, is, and shall continue to be.(33)

It must be added here that it is only in Panikkar that one finds that each of the two approaches to history finds its rightful place: Anthropoc history in Christology that starts from the Jesus of history who points and leads to the Christ of faith; and the tempiternal figure (of Christ) in Christophany who “is as much human as it is divine and cosmic, belonging to the past, the present, and the future”<sup>25</sup>. It is the Cosmotheandric Christ whose Spirit guides the course of anthropic

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25 *Christophany*, 191. Commenting on the words “today was born the Saviour of the world” of the 7th antiphon of the office of the matins for the liturgy of January 1 Panikkar states:

It is therefore not a simple commemoration but the celebration of something contemporary, today’s new birth. The historical reality of Mary’s son transcends time not only in a vertical divine direction (Only-begotten Son of the Father) but likewise in a horizontal one. *Hodie* is neither *ante saecula* (“before the ages”, and by extension, “before time began”) nor *in principio* (“in the beginning”), outside of time, but as a temporal reality that is not limited to the historical fact that occurred twenty centuries ago. To repeat: if we forget either the mystical or the faith dimension, we deform the figure of Mary’s son.

To this I may add, there couldn’t be a better explanation of the karmic aspect of reality than this.



history. At the same time it is this same Mystery that as the antaryami (=the inner controller) oversees the dynamics of karmic history wherein the real possibility of experiencing the Christ constitutes the core of Christophany.<sup>26</sup>

The distinction between the anthropic and the karmic understanding of history, I believe, is important for at least two reasons. One, the anthropic approach shows how Man tries (responsibly or otherwise) to shape his destiny. Here history constitutes an integral element of truth. However this has its limitations where the truth of the spiritual realm is concerned. The truth of the resurrection, for example, cannot be sustained in the anthropic approach because of its exaggerated stress on the historical dimension. Two, the karmic approach on the other hand avoids this pitfall but it is in danger of neglecting responsibility for historical injustices like the treatment meted out to dalits and women. Behind these injustices lurk inhuman attitudes towards dalits and women.

Finally the anthropic and karmic cosmovisions have to complement and correct each other and gradually learn to formulate their positions less exclusively (not “either or”) and more inclusively (but “both and”) without giving up their specific characteristics. If the backbone of the anthropic view is its stress on history the ground of the karmic view is the cosmic reality. The former focuses on Man’s responsibility and the latter on the solidarity of all beings. Where Man’s responsibility is seen in isolation without the background of the solidarity of all beings the result is the rise of individualism and the neglect of Mother Earth. And

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26 Panikkar has worked out a pluralistic theology that takes all religions seriously in that he distinguishes the universe of faith from the pluriverse of belief. His *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. Towards an Ecumenical Christophany. Revised and Enlarged (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1982) was the first step in this direction and his *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* presupposes his final views on pluralism. Panikkar is able to move from Christology to Christophany because for him Christology is about doctrines and Christophany is about encountering the cosmotheandric Christ. Whereas the former is at home in the world of anthropic history and makes sense only there, the latter has moved beyond in order to encounter the tempiternal Christ, who was, is and ever will be the same!

where solidarity of all beings is understood without Man's responsibility the outcome is a caste-ridden society and the neglect of human rights.

That is why it would be a mistake to conclude that a culture is exclusively anthropic or karmic. In the anthropic cosmovision karmic elements need to be discovered and in the karmic cosmovision anthropic elements need to be discovered. Thus, for example, the insight that "He makes the sun shine over the good and the bad and the rain fall over the just and the unjust" shows karmic characteristics! Similarly the criticism "Be it a learned and humble Brahmin or a cow or an elephant or a dog or a cooker of dog-flesh [= the outcaste] – the wise view them all equanimously" (Bhg 5.18) can only emerge in a society that does not support the rigidity and divisiveness of caste-thinking.

In general one could state that cultures have no in-built mechanisms to be self-critical; they are unable to locate their blind spots. It is here that the dialogue of cultures, the charism of our age, comes to our aid.

### 3. Learning from Other Traditions

What the above discussion should make clear is that no tradition and no culture can go it alone today. Our age is bedeviled by problems which no tradition can alone solve. Collaboration, not competition is the need of the hour. Traditions have to learn to correct and complement each other. Arguably this discussion is on the macro-level. But intercultural studies show its fruitfulness on the micro-level too. There are insights which through judicious selection can be fruitful in other cultures too. In what follows I shall offer two examples.

#### 3.1 *The Apaurusheya-Insight*

My doctoral thesis explored the Mimamsa understanding of revelation where the existence of God is rejected. It was a world wherein an eternal Word reveals itself in time without the support of a Creator God. Indeed it actively polemizes against such an assumption.<sup>27</sup>

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27 For instance: If God exists, then such a God must necessarily be omniscient. But only an omniscient person can confirm that God is really omniscient! But which human being is omniscient? See my *Ābdapṛmt"yam in Ābara and Kumrila. Towards a Study of the Mimms Experience of Language* (Vienna: Publications of the De Nobili Research Library Vol. VII, 1980), 193-195.

Veda for the Mimamsakas was not the “book” but the authentic living oral tradition handed down from guru to disciple – beginninglessly.<sup>28</sup> This “text” was considered to be the infallible space-time manifestation of the eternal Veda. For the Mimamsakas, infallibility followed upon its authorlessness just as fallibility was part of the dependence on an author.<sup>29</sup> The Mimamsakas went to great lengths to “prove” (a) the eternality of the Vedas and (b) their authorlessness (*apaurusheyatva*). They distinguished between immutable eternality (*kktastha-nityat*) and beginninless eternality (*andi-nityat*). The solitary example of the former was the eternal word (*Zabda*) which revealed itself through specific human sounds; the latter was the oral handing down of the vedic tradition by the guru to the sishya.

Be that as it may, for us who live in a pluralistic world it is not difficult to see that acceptance of revelation by and its specific understanding in a religious tradition is directly conditioned by its cosmovision. For Christians revelation is the self-revelation of a “personal” God but for the Mimamsakas, whose cosmovision has no place for God, revelation is authorless, *apaurusheya*; it is given, it is simply there in much the same way that sugar is sweet!<sup>30</sup> The attribute of *apaurusheya* ensures that there is no error whatsoever in the Veda. Error, they say, arises when there is an author but where there is no author and especially where there is no possibility of an author there is equally no possibility of error!<sup>31</sup>

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- 28 The Mimamsakas try to “prove” their belief in the eternality of the Veda with the help of quaint arguments. See my *Īabdaprmī’yam in Īabara and Kumrila.. Towards a Study of the M+mms Experience of Language* (Vienna: Publications of the De Nobili Research Library Vol. VII, 1980), 192-200. Beliefs, as constitutive elements of our preunderstanding, guide our lives systemically. Their linguistic expressions are conditioned by the spatio-temporal contexts of their respective cultures.
- 29 In the other schools only the Nyaya believed in an Ishvara who reveals the Veda; but even for the Nyaya Ishvara was only the revealer, not the author of the Veda.
- 30 The *Apaurusheyatva*-belief of the Mimamsakas could be said to be the functional equivalent of the Christian belief in divine revelation. Authorlessness guarantees absence of error as does divine revelation.
- 31 To bolster this thesis, the Mimamsakas bring in other theses too. (a) “When syllables are uttered in a certain sequence they bring forth word-meaning and

For a good many of our contemporaries "God" does not anymore seem to be the answer to the question about the meaning of life. This does not mean that people today have become *Godless*. It is only that they no longer find the beliefs and practices of the traditional religions convincing. On the other hand the "givenness" of things does not pose any great problem to them. Living as they do in a secular world the "givenness" of things does not trouble them. But even in a secular world the poet, the philosopher, the prophet – all of them – depend on "inspiration". Neither poetry nor philosophy nor prophesy is a mere human product. They come *through*, but not *from* these gifted persons. Apaurusheya, in my understanding, is the secular mode of referring to the depth-dimension of reality.<sup>32</sup>

The relevance of the apaurusheya nature of revelation in an age where the secularization-process is spreading must not be overlooked. The support from the scientific world for the secular cosmovision is bound to increase; hence traditional religions must in their own interest be ready to dialogue with it. It is obvious that in a secular cosmovision the depth-dimension of reality cannot be expressed in the way that the language of traditional religions does. On the other hand traditional religions need to revamp and update their understanding of God. The traditional accounts are misfits in an epoch where scientific thinking is able to offer a more meaningful account of some of the things for which traditionally God was postulated. This has already started taking place in some instances.<sup>33</sup>

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when word-meanings occur in a certain order they bring forth on their own sentence-meaning. (b) The Veda-complex has no author but is the product of a beginningless chain of Veda-recitation through which disciples learn it. (c) Knowledge is intrinsically self-validating.

(svataŪ-prmī"yam) It does not require validation from the outside through extrinsic statements. See my *ġabdaprmī"yam in ġabara and Kumrila*

32 In India "secular" has come to mean all things to all. The common element may be "anything but traditional religion"! For a positive and, in my opinion, profound understanding of the "secular" world see Panikkar's *Worship and Secular Man* (Maryknoll: Orbis, etc. 1973). Also my "Religion and Secularism. An Exploration into the Secular Dimension of Religion and the Religious Dimension of Secularism" in: *Jnanadeepa. Pune Journal of Religious Studies* 1:1 (1998), 106-126.

33 See, e.g. Hans Kessler (Hg.), *Gott, der Kosmos und die Freiheit*. Biologie,



### 3.2 Christian Eucharist and Hindu Yajña<sup>34</sup>

Prima facie nothing could be as far apart as are Christian Eucharist and Vedic Yajña. The Eucharist with its Greek name, highly personalistic and kenotic content and stylized meal-form is basically a communitarian celebration, something uniquely unfamiliar in the Vedic ritual world. On the other hand the ritual world of the Veda with its accompanying mythological hymns appears to show little or no concern for any self-emptying process.

But appearances are deceptive! A vedic hymn (Rig-Veda I.64.35) states: Yajña is the navel of the world! The navel is that centre on which the whole of reality hangs, as it were. This is indeed an insightful metaphor!<sup>35</sup> The world is perceived here as a Yajña, sacrifice, which (unlike in the Judeo-Christian world) is understood as a world that is thoroughly interconnected, interdependent and interrelated<sup>36</sup>. The Gita adds to all this the new element of sharing when it states that one reaches the Highest Goal when human beings maintain this interdependence wherein they sustain the Devas and the Devas sustain human beings (3.11). However when one enjoys the gifts of the Devas and offers nothing in return, one is a thief (3.12); thus those who “cook for themselves” eat evil (3.13)!

In the context of Yajña food (*annam*) is an important ingredient and exhibits the following characteristics: Firstly, food is something

Philosophie und Theologie im Gespräch (Würzburg: Echter, 1996); Hans Kessler, *Das Stöhnen der Natur*. Pläydoyer für eine Schöpfungsspiritualität und Schöpfungsethik (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1990); Francis X. D'Sa, “The World as Creation and Creation as a Cosmotheandric Reality in Christianity”, in: Peter Koslowski (Ed.), *Nature and Technology in the World Religions* (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 29-46.

34 See my “Christian Eucharist and Hindu Yajña”, in: Sebastian Painadath (Ed.), *Co-worker for your Joy*. Festschrift in honour of George Gispert-Sauch (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006), 100-124.

35 “Re-Searching the Divine. The World of Symbol and the Language of Metaphor”, in: Job Kozhamthadam (Ed.), *Interrelations and Interpretation*. Philosophical Reflections on Science, Religion and Hermeneutics in Honour of Richard De Smet, S.J. and Jean de Marneffe, S.J. (New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1997), 141-173.

36 See The Bhagavadgita 3.14-15.

that is eaten and digested. What is not digested is not real food! Secondly, food is something that is not for itself but for someone or some thing (*parrthatva*)! Thirdly, food is subject to the one who eats! In this perspective everything is ultimately food. This process of interdependence in which every single being is dependent on the whole and at the same time contributes to the whole – this whole theocosmic process is Brahman. Outside this process there is no one who can “consume” this process. So it is said that Brahman is food, inexhaustible food because though consumed Brahman is never exhausted! This is the ultimate paradox. Brahman is ultimately real food which everyone eats but in spite of that Brahman remains inexhaustible because ultimately Brahman eats everyone and everything! Whether one likes it or not, in the end everyone and everything is dependent on, subservient to and destined for Brahman who is the whole of reality! To realize this is to become Brahman! When therefore it is stated that Yajña is the navel of reality it should be clear that reality is really real as long as the process of Yajña (*parrthatva*) is maintained.

In the totally different cosmovision of the eucharistic ritual Jesus is portrayed as summing up on the night before he died the essence of his life and his message. Taking two symbols, bread and wine, which are the end-products of two (cosmic) processes of self-emptying – everything from the grain and the grape to the bread and the wine has first to die so that life may emerge. Jesus identifies his life with them: My body broken “for you” and my blood “shed for you”. The Eucharist makes present the kenotic person par excellence, Jesus, with the injunction “do this in memory of me!” The word memory here, so it seems to me, is absolutely inadequate. What is probably meant is that we keep alive Jesus’ kenotic principle by realizing it in our lives!

Now take the *parrthatva* of the Yajña-tradition and the hyper hymôn of the Eucharist-tradition and we discover that the former is a cosmic principle at work in the karmic cosmovision and the latter an anthropic principle in the personalistic cosmovision. They are not identical; they are functional equivalents: What Yajña is in the Hindu tradition Eucharist is in the Catholic tradition.

When more and more believers from both the traditions begin to realize and assimilate this the process of inter-culturation will be

accelerated. That is when osmotic and symbiotic processes of inter-culturation between the two traditions will start and mutual cross-cultural fecundation will begin. The kenotic tradition will enrich, complement and correct the yajñic tradition and vice versa. Concretely the kenotic tradition has to discover its cosmic dimension; and the karmic tradition has to discover its personalistic dimension. The outcome will then be not a new (third) tradition but a fuller and more holistic version in both the cases. In practice this will mean that one-sided and partial formulations will give way to more inclusive expressions - expressions that will be amenable to the work of bridge-building and mutual understanding between the two traditions.

#### 4. Globalization vis à vis Inter-culturation

Two paradigms confront us today: Globalization spreading as it is far and wide rides roughshod over the smaller regional cultures with no care whatever for their survival. On the other hand, inter-culturation<sup>37</sup> respects every culture and gives it its due; more importantly it reminds cultures that they are not islands but networks communicating and sharing meaning. Sharing meaning is really the high road to Pentecost!

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37 See my "Inkulturation und Interkulturation. Versuch einer Begriffserklärung", in: Michael Heberling, Gerhard Rott, Horst Sing (Hrsg), *Inkulturation als Herausforderung und Chance*. Dokumentation des 1. Dialogforums der Partnerdiözesen Poona und Eichstätt. Grundfragen, Pastorale Herausforderungen, Erfahrungen aus Partnerschaften (Aachen: Riese Springer Verlag, 2001), 32-52.

# Celebrating Differences

## Some Experiences of Inter-Religious Dialogue

Subhash Anand

Subhash Anand, Professor (em) of Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, describes how inter-religious dialogue can become an integral way of life and thinking in India. Dialogue is not a levelling down of differences but celebrating differences. A respectful perception of differences enriches one's own faith. This he shows by reflecting on the dialogical nature of the Trinity from the Christian side and on the understanding of the *Purusha* from the Hindu side. He shares his conviction that Jesus is the hermeneusis of religions. He concludes by upholding humaneness as the soul of a culture of dialogue.

In this article I am attempting a sort of an autobiography with inter-religious dialogue as my focus.<sup>1</sup> It is not merely a record of what happened, but also an attempt to spell out the map that guided me in my journey, and the insights I gained as I tried to journey with other pilgrims.

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1 As guidelines, I was given the following questions:

1. What have been the major insights that you got in your doctoral research?
2. How did your perspectives evolve over the years after the doctoral studies in encounter with Hindu persons /scriptures/ themes...?
3. In the present context of rising fundamentalist ideas in certain Hindu (Hindutva / RSS) and Christian (Pentecostals / Charismatics) circles how would you envisage the creative role of Hindu-Christian Dialogue?

In my article, I start much before my doctoral programme: for two reasons. The vision that guided me in my doctoral and post-doctoral encounter with



I grew up in a traditional family, with all the prejudices traditional families tend to have. I believed that only Catholics, and to some extent the other Christians, were good. After joining the seminary, coming closer to the ecclesiastical world, I discovered a different world: there is so much goodness outside the narrow boundaries of the Church, and so much evil in the Church. Vatican II, with its clear affirmation that the saving grace of God is active outside the Church, confirmed my shift: from “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*” to “*extra ecclesiam multa salus*”. In fact, sometimes I felt “*intra ecclesiam nulla salus*”, as some theologians seemed to have said after Vatican II.<sup>2</sup>

### The Formative Years

I have many reasons to be grateful. I joined the seminary while Vatican II was being planned. I received my training while it was actually taking place. I was at Papal Seminary, Pune, a seminary very open to the new thinking in the Church. Prof. Josef Neuner, S.J., – a person deeply committed to the Church and therefore to theology – taught me theology. It would be more correct to say that he taught us to theologize. Church leaders realized this and so he was asked to be a *peritus* – theological adviser – for the Council. After every session, he briefed us about the major trends of thinking within the Council.

In my very first year in Pune (1960), Fr. Lionel Mascarenhas, S.J., introduced me to classical Indian Music. In 1962 I started studying Sanskrit under the guidance of Fr. Cyril Pereira, S.J. While doing theology, a few of us formed a club: to study Hinduism. We met occasionally and made a presentation. Mine was “The Upanishadic Idea of Salvation”. My companions encouraged me. Fr. Neuner accepted the paper in place of my exam for his subject, Christology. That was my first paper to be published.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes friends ask me

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Hinduism was formed much before my doctoral studies. Secondly, my doctoral studies carry forward some of the most significant insights into Hinduism I had already acquired.

- 2 Swami Vivekanand is reported to have said: “It is good to be born in a Church, but bad to die in it.”
- 3 Subhash ANAND, “The Upanishadic Theology of Salvation”, *Paths* (Pontifical Athenaeum Studies), II-3 (1967), pp. 1-26.

as to why I did all this. Frankly I have no clear answer. Very often God works very quietly in our lives. Fr. Neuner's lectures on Christology are foundational for my thinking.

In 1968 I was invited to join the staff of the Pontifical Athenaeum (now Jnanadeep Vidyapeeth), Pune. I decided to continue my study of Hinduism, and to do it in India. After my M.A. in Sanskrit from Karnatak University, Dharwad, I joined Banaras Hindu University for my doctoral research on *Bhāgavatapurāna* – a 10th century text that is very sacred for Vaishnavas. I tried to understand what this text understands by holiness and what path it proposes to pursue it.

### Christological Moorings

I believe that before the foundation of the world, the Father chose all humans to be His children, by sharing in the event of Jesus the Christ. The mystery of incarnation is not the consequence of some sin, but is a revelation of the gracious love of God. In the Word-become-flesh, not only humans, but all creation reaches its fullness. I would even say that without the incarnation – the becoming visible of the Invisible God – creation would remain incomplete. Creation is God's initial revelation, pointing to and finding its fulfilment in incarnation.

The incarnation reveals that the God we believe in is a mystery of loving dialogue. This is what we mean when we say that God is unity within trinity. The three Persons who constitute the divine mystery are a bond of ineffable love and communion. They are unique, and without surrendering their uniqueness they constitute one single mystery of love. Dialogue is not the levelling down of differences, but celebrating the differences. Differences bring about enrichment. The divine Trinity is thus a model for and an invitation to dialogue. Nay, we cannot be Christians and refrain from dialogue: we believe humans are made in the image of the Triune God. We cannot confine ourselves to our little ghetto. That would be an implicit denial of the Trinity. We can be Christians only by being in a dialogue of love and service.

Our faith in the divinity of Jesus should impel us to dialogue with peoples of other faiths. The New Testament picture of Jesus is shaped by the religious background of the first Christians. They were mostly Jews, and so they used images familiar to them from the Old Testament

to spell out what Jesus meant for them: paschal lamb, good shepherd, life-giving vine, lord of the Sabbath, etc. They saw Old Testament rites in their religious celebrations: Baptism as circumcision, Eucharist as paschal meal. Jesus was the new Moses, the new Samuel, the real David, etc. If Jesus is really divine, then no one culture, however great it may be, is adequate to articulate the mystery of Jesus. To claim the contrary would be tantamount to the denial of his divinity.

I enter into dialogue with peoples of other faiths to learn new ways of looking at God, new ways of understanding His presence in our life and history, new ways of responding to Him, new ways of celebrating His love. The Synod of Asian Bishops has "expressed encouragement to *theologians* in their delicate work of developing an inculturated theology, especially in the area of Christology."<sup>4</sup> We need to learn from St. Paul.

Evangelizers can take heart from the experience of Saint Paul who engaged in dialogue with the philosophical, cultural and religious values of his listeners (cf. *Acts* 14:13-17; 17:22-31). Even the Ecumenical Councils of the Church which formulated doctrines binding on the Church had to use the linguistic, philosophical and cultural resources available to them. Thus these resources become a shared possession of the whole Church, capable of expressing her Christological doctrine in an appropriate and universal way. They are part of the heritage of faith which must be appropriated and shared again and again in the encounter with the various cultures.<sup>5</sup>

The Church in Asia has a long way to go before Asians stop seeing Jesus as "a Westerner rather than an Asian figure."<sup>6</sup> The New Testament writers gave us Jewish Jesus. Then a Greco-Roman Jesus emerged, more like the Roman emperor, and less like the poor prophet of Nazareth. In the 19th century, Keshab Chandra Sen (1834-1888), who succeeded Raja Ram Mohan Roy as the leader of the Brahmo Samaj, once remarked: "It seems that the Christ that has come to us is an Englishman, with English manners and customs about him, and with

4 *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 22.

5 *Ibid.*, no. 20.

6 *Idem.*

the temper and spirit of an Englishman about him.”<sup>7</sup> In the 20th century some were unfairly accused of making Jesus a Marxist. Even if they did that, we should not be sorry about it. Now we need a Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist Jesus. The more we interpret Jesus using all the wisdom of humanity, the more we will see – even then it will not be much – what a gift the Father has given us in Jesus. In like manner, the Bible will be fully understood only when it is translated and transcultured into all the languages of the world.<sup>8</sup>

If the incarnation is God’s original plan for the whole of creation, then from the beginning the whole of humanity is moving towards Jesus. All cultures contain elements that point to him, and find fulfilment in him. Through dialogue I discover the presence of Jesus in other peoples much before the Church arrived on the scene. “Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church: they stimulate her both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ’s presence and of the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all.”<sup>9</sup> We need to recognize “the Spirit’s action in Asian societies, cultures and religions, through which the Father prepares the hearts of Asian peoples for the fullness of life in Christ.”<sup>10</sup>

The first Christians believed that Jesus is the fulfilment of the expectations of the people of the Old Testament. Hence they interpreted those texts in the light of their experience of Jesus. They sincerely believed that they, and not the Jews, understood those texts correctly. In like manner, if Jesus is really the expectation of the nations, then I am inclined to believe that Jesus is God’s hermeneusis of all religions.

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7 Quoted by Hans STAFFNER in *Jesus Christ and the Hindu Community: Is a Synthesis of Hinduism and Christianity Possible?*, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1988, p. 10.

8 By ‘transculturation’ I mean translating a text in such a way that the images in the original text are replaced by corresponding images from another culture. In a Jewish or Muslim context it will be a horrible humiliation looking after pigs (Lk 15:15), but not so in a community that relishes pork, and considers a festal meal incomplete without a pork dish.

9 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 56.

10 *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 20.



I am inclined to believe that Jesus enables me to understand the religions of others better than they themselves do. This sounds to be a tall claim, but I am basing myself on my experience. I have shared with my Hindu friends some of my writings on Hinduism, and they have wondered how I saw what they did not see.<sup>11</sup>

We believe that in the mystery of incarnation, the one eternal Word became flesh (Jn 1.14). This Word has shaped not only all things, but He is also the life that is light, shaping the thinking of all people of good will. As Vatican II teaches, from the beginning of humanity, the Father

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- 11 Reviewing one of my books, Prof. Manohar Rai SARDESAI, remarked: "He alone could have written such an informative, thought-provoking and enthralling book." Book-review of *Major Hindu Festivals: A Christian Appreciation*, Bombay: St. Pauls, 1991, in *Renovação*, 1991, p. 373a. In a letter to me dated 15th March, 1998, Ravindra KELEKAR, who has transcreated *Mahābhārata* in three volumes in Konkani, commenting on my book *Śiva's Thousand Names: An Interpretative Study of Śivasahasranāma* (New Delhi: Intercultural Pubs., 1998), wrote: "I have always felt that your deep insights into things Hindu would make great Hindu scholars envious." Another comment: "The book compels our attention by its refreshing interpretation." G. VISWANATHAN, Book-review of *Story as Theology: An Interpretative Study of Five Episodes from the Māhābhārata*, New Delhi: Intercultural Pubs., in *The Vedanta Kesari*, January 1999, p. 38. In a inter-religious meeting held recently (7th All-India Seminar on "Religion And Morality", organized by Samvada – A Forum For Understanding Religion, Haridwar, Uttarakhand, India, 20, 21, 22 March 2009), I presented a paper on Varna-Āśrama-Dharma, a very important traditional Hindu concept. I tried to show how this concept, though Hindu in origin, is an expression of a deep insight into our humanness. As such, it can be the foundation of a secular morality. Commenting on it Dr. S. R. Bhatt, Professor of Philosophy (Rtd.), Delhi University, remarked: "The scholarly paper of Prof. Subhash Anand "

*Varnāśrama-dharma*" is an appreciable attempt to properly understand one of the seminal theories of traditional Indian culture. It is a good exercise in trans-creative interpretation of a theory which had healthy influence on individual and social life of India once upon a time but which was soon distorted and misunderstood resulting in terrible ill-effects. It is written with a positive and constructive mind with a view to restoring its pristine purity and removing the contamination it has suffered from the perverting influences due to travesty of history." For those who wish to read this paper, see "Varn[rama-Dharma: Towards a Universal Ethical Theory", *Journal of Indian Theology*, 2-1 (January – April, 2009), pp. 68-87.

has been inviting all to Himself through "the seeds of the Word."<sup>12</sup> Hence all religions "reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men."<sup>13</sup> Hence the Council urges Christians who wish to be witness of Jesus to "be familiar with their national and religious traditions; let them gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their followers."<sup>14</sup> The seeds of the Word are above all to be found in the scriptures of humanity. Hence in our concern for dialogue we need to have a dialogic approach to the Word of God.

As disciples of Jesus we need to learn from him. We see him engaged in dialogue with non-Jews. John gives us an account of Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman. "To the Jews, the Samaritans were a heretical and schismatic group of spurious worshippers of the God of Israel, who were detested even more than the pagans."<sup>15</sup> The woman is quite aware of the disdainful attitude of Jews towards her people, and so she does not miss the chance to hit back: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria" (4.9)? Jesus is not put off by her rudeness, but makes that the starting point of a long conversation. They discuss religious topics: real life, true worship, the messiah to come. She wants to hear more and more from Jesus, and eventually she comes to believe in him.

On another occasion Jesus is so taken up by the disposition of a Roman centurion that he exclaims: "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith (*pistis*, Mt 8.10). He praises the Canaanite woman, who refused to be rebuffed by the harsh words of Jesus. So great was her faith (*pistis*, Mt 15.28), that Jesus is forced to rethink his position: she deserves more than the crumbs of bread that fall from the master's table.<sup>16</sup> He realizes that he is sent not merely for Jews,

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12 *Ad Gentes*, no. 15.

13 *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2. My own experience makes me believe that this is an understatement.

14 *Ad Gentes*, no. 11.

15 John L. McKENZIE, *Dictionary of the Bible*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corp., 1998, pp. 765b-66b, here p. 765b.

16 If it is impossible to please God without faith (*pistis*, Heb 11.6), and if even those who do not accept Jesus can be saved, then it is difficult to understand

but for all humans. He could appreciate the religious depth in others; may even accept their superiority to his own people. He was indeed a very broadminded person, a model for inter-religious dialogue.

### Initial Encounters

In 1972 I was asked to give a course on Early Indian Philosophy – concerned with the teaching of the Vedas. As a seminarian, I myself had already done some studies in this area. But we study better when we prepare to give classes. Somehow I find it difficult to follow lecture material prepared by others. I need to prepare my own. Merely telling people what others think is not philosophy, but history of philosophy. I tend to take off from what others have said, and make my own reflections. Two themes struck me very powerfully.

I was fascinated by the *Purusha-sūkta*.<sup>17</sup> When this hymn was composed, the Vedic seers believed that sacrifice (*yajña*) is the centre (*nābhi*) of this creation,<sup>18</sup> holding together in harmony all the elements and forces that go to make it. The *Purusha-sūkta* describes a mysterious ancient sacrifice from which everything in this universe came to be. During this sacrifice the primordial Purusha was cut into pieces, and from these emerged the different parts of creation.<sup>19</sup>

Our ancestors, who were primal but not primitive people, realized that only humans can become aware of others as others. Only humans can affirm others as others. They realized that this was possible fundamentally because they could be aware of and affirm themselves

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and accept what the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith asserts in its declaration *Dominus Iesus*, issued on 6th August, 2000: “For this reason, the distinction between *theological faith* and *belief* in the other religions, must be *firmly held*” (no. 7).” I am afraid this goes against what Jesus said about the centurion! The real Dominus Iesus would be very uncomfortable with the Roman *Dominus Iesus*!

17 *Rg-veda*, 10.90.

18 1.164.34-35.

19 The hymn lends itself to a rich interpretation. For a more comprehensive treatment see “Purusha-yajña: Self-giving as the Mystery of Being”, in Subhash ANAND, *Hindu Inspiration for Christian Reflection: Towards a Hindu-Christian Theology*, ANAND (Gujarat): Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2004, pp. 1-64.

as 'I'. They were aware that because they had this I-awareness, they could also surrender themselves to other humans – or refuse to do so – in a way no other living being could do. They felt that though in some way they are similar to and in communion with the rest of creation, they are also significantly different. They are persons (*purusha*). In as much as every creature is a reflection of Purusha, it has a personal character and – I shall add – its own humanity, because our experience of what it means to be persons is inseparably connected to our experience of what it means to be human. This provides us a deeper motivation for concern for the whole of creation.

The early Upanishads teach that Brahman is Ātman.<sup>20</sup> The word *ātman* is derived from the root *an* (to breathe), and comes to mean not only breath, but also the body or some of its parts.<sup>21</sup> But already in the *Vedas*, we have “the incipient use of *ātman* (soul) in a reflexive sense.”<sup>22</sup> Hence a being that has an *ātman* is a being that is reflexively in possession of itself, it knows itself: “I am so and so.” Being in possession of itself, it can dispose of itself. It is free. Brahman is also *vijñāna* and *ānanda*: Wisdom and Bliss.<sup>23</sup> He is *satya*, *jñāna* and *ananta*: Being, Knowledge, and Infinite.<sup>24</sup> Later Upanishads will say that Brahman is *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda*: He is Being, Awareness and Bliss.<sup>25</sup>

These formulae spell out the full significance of the basic insight: “Ātman is Brahman”. Being (*sat*), is no doubt primary, but by itself it cannot be perfect. Then it is just out there. Self-possession perfects

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20 *Chāndogya-upanishad*, 3.14.4; 5.11.1; *Bṛihadāranyaka-upanishad*, 2.5.19; 4.4.5, 25.

21 SURYAKANTA, *A Practical Vedic Dictionary*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 133.

22 Arthur A. MACDONELL, *A Vedic Grammar for Students*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, reprint, 1966, p. 112.

23 *Bṛihadāranyaka-upanishad*, 3.9.28.

24 *Taittirīya-upanishad*, 2.1.1.

25 For the references, see G. A. JACOB, *A Concordance to the Principal Upanishads and Bhagavad-gita*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1891, rep. 1971, p. 954.



being, for then being is with itself. Self-possession is the result of awareness, of the presence of being to itself. Greater the self-awareness greater will be the being of being. By saying that Brahman is Ātman, the Upanishads want to affirm that the perfection of Brahman is constituted by His perfect self-possession, and this is because he is infinite knowledge or awareness (*cit*). Brahman is infinite being and He not only *has* perfect self-awareness (*ātma-vat*), but He also *is* perfect Self-awareness (*Ātman*). This leads to total self-acceptance, and this is total joy (*ānanda*). Self-awareness makes self-disponibility possible. Only beings that have self-awareness can be truly free. This explains why our spiritual masters insist on silence, for without silence we cannot come to self-awareness. Self-awareness is essential for our Christian ministry – whatever be its form. Without it we would be very shallow, trying to give what we do not really have.

### Deeper Probing

One of the important ideas in the Upanishads is the power of *satya*: it alone conquers: “*satyam eva jayate na anṛtam*”.<sup>26</sup> My doctoral research into the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* confirmed my conviction formed while studying the Upanishads. The power of *satya* rests in the presupposition that *satya* is concerned above all with a mode of being, and not with the veracity of knowledge, much less of a mathematical or theological formula.<sup>27</sup> Deepest truth is personal, and in God truth and person become identical. In the Christian framework, we can even say, three persons together constitute the Truth that is God. Thus truth is not only personal, but also inter-personal. It is that quality which makes my being and my relation to others authentically personal.

26 *Mundaka-upanishad*, 1.6. The critical edition reads “*satyam eva jayati...*”, and indicates “*satyam eva jayate...*” as a variant (LIMAYE & R. D. VADEKAR (eds.), *Eighteen Principal Upaniṣads*, p. 45). Following the rule of *lectio difficilior*, I am inclined to believe that what is considered a variant is the original text. The idea is not so much that truth conquers somebody (*parasmaipada*), but that it vindicates itself (*ātmanepada*).

27 For a detailed presentation of this insight, see “Religion for Our Times: An Upanishadic Perspective”, *Journal of Indian Theology*, 1/2 (May - August, 2008), pp. 36-57.

The *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* begins by declaring its subject: “*dharma paramo satām*” (1.1.2). I have argued elsewhere that by ‘*sat*’ the text here means a holy person, one who is whole-heartedly devoted to God and is kind and compassionate towards others. In short, it proposes to explain the way of the saints.<sup>28</sup> This helps us to understand why the same text gives so great importance to *sat-sanga*, the company of holy persons.<sup>29</sup> We have a charming story to explain the power of *sat-sanga*.

Some people wish to bring Gangā to the earth, and so they perform severe penance, but she does not oblige. It is only with the penance of Bhagīratha that she is pleased and agrees to come down, but then she has two difficulties: all sinners will come and have bath in her, and thus destroy her beauty and purity; second, if she falls on the earth, straight from heaven the earth will be torn apart by the impact. The second is solved by Śiva agreeing to receive her on his head. As for the first, Bhagīratha tells her: “Holy people, who have renounced everything, enjoying deep penance within, firmly rooted in God, and capable of purifying the whole earth, will come and bathe in you. By coming in contact with their body you will be freed from all sin, for in them dwells the Lord who removes all sins.” (9.9.6). The saints will bathe in the Gangā and thereby restore her sanctity!

Just as the *Brahma-sūtra* is considered the summary of the teaching of the Upanishads, so too the *Nārada-bhakti-sūtra* is believed to summarise the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. I am inclined to believe that inspired by the story given above, it makes three very bold claims (69): “*santa tīrthīkurvanti tīrthāni, sukarmīkurvanti karmāni, sacchāstrīkurvanti sāstrāni*.”<sup>30</sup> Allow me to translate the text, using Christian theological jargon: “A holy person (not his grave) by his presence sanctifies the place of pilgrimage. He makes the sacraments truly effective. He gives Scripture its transforming power.” This claim finds

28 Subhash ANAND, *The Way of Love: The Bhāgavata Doctrine of Bhakti*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1996, pp. 8-9.

29 Ibid., pp. 157-81.

30 *Nārada-bhakti-sūtra*, tr. Swami Tyāgiśānanda, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2001, p. 19.

its most potent verification in the person of Jesus. If what the Church claims to do today is helpful, it is not because of some past event (*opus operatum*), but because of the living and active presence of the Risen Lord (*opus operiens*). If Jesus had not been raised from the dead and powerfully alive with his disciples, there would not have been any Church with her sacraments or Christian scriptures.

### Embodying Sincerity

After my doctoral studies, my teaching compelled me to study Modern Hinduism. I read Mahatma Gandhi more attentively. In his life and teaching, the Upanishadic concept of *satya* and the later ideal of *sat-purusha* find a contemporary presentation. In 1929, Gandhi reversed his earlier statement: from “God is Truth” to “Truth is God”.<sup>31</sup> This means that only through *satya* can we come to God: we “have no God to serve but Truth.”<sup>32</sup> Since *satya* is profoundly existential in nature, it calls for a response from the whole person. Since *satya* is primarily a mode of being, we can come to *satya* only by a way of life, by a constant struggle to live *satya*, by a sustained effort to become what we ought to be. Or to make a pun, we can understand truth only by standing under it, by placing ourselves under it, allowing it to dominate us, to overcome us, to transform us. God reveals Himself through word and deed. The desire for Truth must lead to an experience of Truth (*anubhava*), to a way of being (*bhava*) in harmony with (*anu*) Truth.

Gandhi is less concerned about the correctness of a statement. What matters for him more is the honest search for Truth. For him sincerity is more important than infallibility. Authentic personal presence is more significant than perennially valid statements. Life is more convincing than doctrine. Yes, he proves to us that Truth alone conquers. Slowly I understood that his Satyagraha was much more than a political tool. It was his life.<sup>33</sup> I find Gandhi particularly significant

31 Mohandas K. GANDHI, *In Search of the Supreme*, 3 vols., ed.: V.B. Kher, Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, 1961, vol. 1, p. 11.

32 Mohandas K. GANDHI 1946: *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, eds.: R.K. Prabhu & U.R. Rao, Madras: Oxford University Press, (1945) rev. ed., p. 27.

33 For a detailed presentation of Gandhi's understanding of Satyagraha, see

for our commitment to inter-religious dialogue. In his life, silence and dialogue, thought and action, sustained involvement and inner freedom, the ancient and the modern, loyalty to one's own religious beliefs and sincere openness to other faith traditions, seem to meet in wonderful harmony.

### Promoting Peace

In the context of growing fundamentalism within and outside the Church, what shape should inter-religious dialogue take; what should be the contribution of Christians? My engagement with Hindus and Hinduism shows me that what is most important is *satya*. To attain this we need awareness (*cit*) of what we are (*sat*), and we need to accept what we are (*ānanda*). To do this we do not necessarily have to belong to any traditional religion. Our humaneness is more foundational than the particular religion we belong to. Religious truths are less significant than *satya*. This, I believe, is the basis for dialogue. Religion is helpful only if there is humaneness. Grace presupposes nature. Fundamentalism flourishes when we put aside our common humanity and give more importance to a specific set of formulae and a particular code of laws. If religion, whatever be its name and claim, does not make us truly human, then it ceases to be authentic religion. We do not need it.

Besides the inter-religious dialogue meetings that are now and then reported by the media, many other forms of inter-religious activities are taking place, e.g., working together to help others. Inter-religious dialogue is not the work only of specialists or confined to some centres. It is a way of life, and the vocation of the Church, particularly the Church in Asia. The Synod of Asian Bishops "confirmed the importance of dialogue as a *characteristic mode of the Church's life in Asia*."<sup>34</sup> It is sad to note that, exceptions apart, "the need for inter-religious dialogue is not generally well appreciated nor supported on ground by

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"Satyagraha: A Theological Model for India", in Subhash ANAND, *Hindu Inspiration for Christian Reflection: Towards a Hindu-Christian Theology*, ANAND (Gujarat): Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2004, pp. 176-201.



Church members..."<sup>35</sup> I am afraid, we are still a Church confined to our compound.

One aspect needs special emphasis: simple inter-religious hospitality. In a world of fast life, real hospitality is become a 'threatened species'. Long ago our sages advised us to treat a guest as God: "*atithidevo bhava*".<sup>36</sup> Hospitality provides a friendly atmosphere to share and it respects the otherness of the other, and the partners believe that what they share are "hospitable truths, truths which allow the warm welcoming of the truths of others."<sup>37</sup> Gandhi, who comes from a devout Vaishnava family, tells us that his father offered hospitality to Jain monks, Parsi and Muslim friends. These "would talk to him about their own faith, and he would listen to them with respect, and often with interest. Being his nurse, I often had a chance to be present at these talks. These many things combined to inculcate in me a toleration for all faiths."<sup>38</sup> All Christians, who wish to promote inter-religious harmony, should rediscover the art of receiving and being guests. We need to find time and energy to reach out to peoples in our neighbourhood, irrespective of religion. This may need a different way of life.

In this context, a monastery or an ashram becomes an ideal place for inter-religious dialogue, which "arises naturally from welcoming strangers, from practising a contemplative form of prayer and from personal commitment to the search of God."<sup>39</sup> The monk is given to discernment, and as such knows how to listen – an art so important for dialogue.<sup>40</sup> He is also concerned with the most important questions of

35 Anthony O'Mahony & Peter Bowe, OSB (eds.), *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality*, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2006, p. 15.

36 *Taittiriya-upanishad*, 1.11.

37 O'Mahony & Bowe, *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality*, p. 8.

38 Mohandas K. GANDHI, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House, (1927-29) 14th rep. (no date), p. 28.

39 O'Mahony & Bowe, *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality*, p. 11.

40 This demands that we be very careful when admitting people to regular monastic life. The anxiety for numbers has destroyed many well-intentioned ventures in the Church.

life and so is at home with silence. He is aware that the humanity of Jesus is not only fragmentary and but also fragmented. Dialogue embraces those humans who experience brokenness in one form or the other.

Here we must face a question: Can there be an inter-religious monastery or ashram? Gandhi gave a lead. The ashram is "a community of men of religion."<sup>41</sup> The ashram brought together Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis, and others.<sup>42</sup> Their praying together, using the different Scriptures, was a sustained effort in dialogue, which was for them also a hermeneutical experience, bringing them not only a deeper understanding of their own religious tradition, but also a joyful acceptance of the best in the other faiths.<sup>43</sup>

Dialogue is a journey from our brokenness unto the fullness of Truth. I have learnt from my encounter with Hinduism the need we all have to make our own that beautiful prayer first uttered by a Hindu sage much before Jesus appeared in Nazareth:

*asato mā sad gamaya*      From untruth lead me to the Truth.

*tamaso mā jyotir gamaya*      From darkness lead me to Light.

*mṛtyor mā amṛtam gamaya*      From death lead me to Immortality.

Through authentic dialogue we come to *satya*. Only then will we attain the fullness of life. But without a sustained effort to become *satya*, our dialogue will soon become an empty ritual.

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41 Mohandas K. GANDHI, *Ashram Observances in Action*, tr. V.G. Desai, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 2nd imp., 1959, p. 3.

42 GANDHI, *In Search of the Supreme*, vol. I, p. 204.

43 For some years the Christa Prema Seva Ashram in Pune had a core ecumenical community, consisting of religious women from the Anglican and Catholic Churches.

## **CURRENT ISSUES - 1**

# **Women in Civil Society in India**

**Aleyamma Vijayan**

*"You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women."* Jawaharlal Nehru

Aleyamma Vijayan, Director, Sakhi Women's Resource Center, Trivandrum, makes a keen analysis of causes of the social and economic discrimination of women in India. The root cause, she locates, is the patriarchal mindset of the people. This is shown in the story of Meera. There are several movements of women liberation and laws protecting the rights of women. However a strong political will is needed at all levels to overcome the present malaise.

### **Introduction**

The India of 2009 has a woman president, a woman speaker in the Parliament and a woman who heads the ruling party. The foreign secretary is a woman and there are women in other high positions like additional solicitor general. India has the largest number of professionally qualified women and largest population of working women in the world. India has more number of doctors, surgeons, scientists, professors than the United States

The paradox of modern India is that women wield power and hold positions at the topmost levels, yet large sections of women are among the most underprivileged in the country; the sex ratio is skewed against them; maternal mortality is the second-highest in the world; more than 40 per cent of women are illiterate; crimes against women are on the

rise and women's representation in the Parliament and state legislatures has not been more than 10 per cent. Any attempt to increase this representation is met with stiff resistance and lack of political will. The struggles of the women's movement in India have resulted in some changes in policies and programmes and in areas like education, health and laws. Yet much is left undone and women continue to be the neglected and marginalized and remain partial citizens in their homeland.

### **Demands of reservation of seats for women in legislative bodies**

The arguments in favour are by now familiar – (i) Women represent half the population of the country and have the rights to half the seats and parliamentary decisions that affect their lives. (ii) Women have different social and biological experiences that ought to be represented (iii) Women and men have partly conflicting interests, (iv) Women in positions of power can inspire more women to take up these paths.

At present around 10% of the directly elected national representatives are women (61 members of the Lok Sabha's 542). Even in the Rajya Sabha, where members are appointed and therefore can be more easily chosen to represent a wide spectrum of India, only 28 of 242 seats are held by women.

Attempts to establish reservations for women in the Indian Parliament have invoked stiff resistance - and even insecurities - among MPs, mostly male, who are unwilling to dilute their power. Some faces in the resistance camp have raised 'caste' flags against gender-based reservation, thereby successfully stopping the bill every time it emerges. The Samajwadi Party of Uttar Pradesh and Rastriya Janata Dal of Bihar, for example, demand caste quotas within any women's quota that is arrived at. Ironically, these parties are in power in states that are among the very worst in gender indicators - maternal mortality, women's literacy, etc. Nor is their stance consistent: while demanding a caste quota within the women's reservation efforts, they show very little interest in women's reservation within the already existing SC/ST reservation quotas.

Let us look at the status of women in India, in the last 6 decades where men represented women's interests in legislative bodies and in all positions of power



### Status of women in modern India

The Indian society is not homogeneous. There exist diverse religions, cultures, languages and clear rural, urban differences. Hence the term 'Indian women' is not a uniform category and any analysis of status has to take this into consideration.

There are several ways in which one can examine the role and position of women in any society. During the last decades three approaches are discernible. One is to examine the common demographic indications like sex ratio, literacy rate, life expectancy at birth, average of marriage, work participation rate etc. Some scholars prefer to examine status of women in terms of the extent to which women have been assimilated in the nation's developmental programmes and the extent of the impact of development policies on women. And the third approach has been to analyze and assess the oppressive social reality and the lived experiences of women

Since Independence, there has been a tremendous progress with regard to the status of women, though not all of it is satisfactory. Actually, there has been a contradictory process. Scattered across the ages, women have always made their presence felt. Women have made immense contribution in the Freedom Struggle. In fact it was this movement, which brought the secluded, shielded women of India out in the open. But with the end of the freedom euphoria, they were again relegated to the background.

Sporadic events of stirring, stray instances of uprising kept occurring but it was only in the 1970s that women were once again organized together in support of the common cause. The incident, which spearheaded the women's' movement in the 1970's, was the Mathura rape case. The acquittal of policemen charged with the heinous crime of raping young women in Mathura had shaken the women of India to the very core. Several autonomous women's groups started functioning in various urban and suburban areas which slowly spread to rural areas too. But did this unity mean that the women of India had finally awakened? If yes, then why did the Deorala *sati* case take place almost two decades later? A young woman burning herself alive on the funeral pyre of her husband, and a whole village hailing her step

and later worshipping her as a goddess was an incident sufficient to send shudders.

The efforts of the subsequent governments in improving the condition of the women cannot be totally underestimated. Through legislations and various policies in the past sixty years various governments have made attempts to improve the status of women. This also came with a lot of international pressure subsequent to the UN conferences on women, starting with Mexico to Beijing where the 4th World Conference on women took place. India also is a signatory of the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women). There were several legal changes like the Act, which gave women equal right over parental property, the Act which made demanding of dowry a punishable offence, the great Panchayati Raj Act that attempted to empower women at the grass root level and the latest Domestic Violence Act which ensures women are safe within the four walls of their homes. Several other legislations for compulsory registration of marriages, prevention of sexual harassment at workplace, amendments to the rape law etc. are under consideration. The efforts for the improvement of their health and education are also commendable. There are several institutional mechanisms like the National commission for women ([www.ncw.nic.in](http://www.ncw.nic.in)) and policies focusing women like the national and state level policies on women. A National Resource Center for women also gives comprehensive data on women India ([www.nrcw.nic.in](http://www.nrcw.nic.in) )

But the women's movement slowly realized that mere laws and legislations are not enough. Mere changes in the law meant little, unless there was a will and a machinery to implement these. The root of the problem of discrimination against women lay not only in the law, or with the State, but in the mindset of the people. It is the age old patriarchal mindset along with the feudal attitudes that treats women as second class citizens and such values have percolated to all the social institutions like family, religion, media, market etc. Hence awareness building programmes, programmes for victim support, counselling and legal aid work started. Experience and knowledge sharing were inevitable. Although India has not a single unified women's movement, reflecting the complexity of the problem, there is a vibrant,

active but dispersed movement which acts as a watch dog as well as raises issues of women

But many problems are still unsolved. Women continue to be raped, assaulted, murdered, humiliated, mistreated and even butchered before they are born! The roots of discrimination against women are actually imbibed in the social and cultural milieu of the country. If even after six decades of independence, nearly half of a country's population is still in shackles, everybody is responsible for this malaise.

Gender, class and caste ideologies lead to male control (as fathers, husbands and male kin) over female labor power, reproduction, sexuality and mobility. This domination limits women's control over property and other economic resources, which gets translated into male control of political, religious, social and cultural institutions.

### **Problems that still plague half of our population**

Let us think of a rural girl born in a remote village in India. We can name her Meera. If she had been born in remote districts of Tamil Nadu, Bihar or Rajasthan, she may not have lived beyond a few weeks. Feticide, in conjunction with the gross neglect of women's health and dowry deaths, accounts for millions of "missing" women in India. Of the 15 million baby girls born in India each year, nearly 25 percent will not live to see their 15th birthday.

Meera, if she is lucky can go to school but if she is in Jharakand or UP, by the time she is in 4th standard, she has every chance to drop out. Women cannot advance without education. Over 60 per cent of our female population is illiterate. We are far behind in providing free and compulsory education to all. Even today, 50,000 villages do not have a primary school. In 2001-02 the School enrclment ratio was 85.18% for girls of 6-11 years but it dropped to 49% for 11-14 years and the enrolment ratio is just 30% in Jharkand and UP and around 40% in Orissa and Rajasthan<sup>1</sup>. The students and the women's

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1 India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education. (2001). Annual Report 2000-2001. New Delhi. P. 218. India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education ( 2004 ). Annual Report 2003-2004.

movements are demanding that we spend at least 10 per cent of our Budget on education. For girls we need more polytechnics and hostels.

Since Meera is a drop out, her chances of getting an employment with adequate wages is bleak. She may work as an agricultural labourer and shoulder all burdens of housework and child rearing. If her husband is a migrant worker, her responsibility will be manifold

Employment is an important index of economic status of women. Work participation of females has risen markedly over the years. However, this progress is quite sleazy. In India, women constitute 90 per cent of the total marginal workers, but in the organized sector, they constitute only 4 per cent. About 30 million women work as agricultural labourers. The others work on roads, brick kilns, construction projects etc. At the national level the work participation rate of women is 25.68 where as it is 51.93 for men.<sup>2</sup> In industry, women have been thrown out so that expenses on maternity benefits etc. are saved. Women do not get equal pay for equal work, except in government organizations. There is no law for the protection of women who are given work in private sheds and houses.

- 2 **Source:** India, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Central Statistical Organisation. (2003). *Women & Men in India 2002*. New Delhi. P.41.

The overall sex ratio (females per 1000 males)

Year	Kerala	India
1901	1004	972
1911	1008	964
1921	1011	955
1931	1022	950
1941	1027	945
1951	1028	946
1961	1022	941
1971	1016	930
1981	1032	934
1991	1036	927
2001	1058	933

Source: <http://www.indiabudget.nic.in/es2001-02/chapt2002/tab95.pdf>



Of the 4.5 million marriages that take place in India every year, says a 1994 UNICEF report, three million involve girls in the 15-19 age group. In some districts of feudal Rajasthan, over 45 per cent of young girls in the 10-14 age-group are married.

Her parents cannot afford it, but Meera's wedding will be accompanied by a huge dowry, even though the practice is illegal. Inevitably, poor Meera's dowry will not satisfy her husband and his family. They will harass her. Then, the husband will resort to physical violence, battering Meera every day. But our Meera is lucky; she will not die due to dowry-related violence, like one woman does every 102 minutes in India.

All forms of violence haunt women from across class, caste and region. In spite of several laws and other mechanisms, the most prominent expression of patriarchy is the sexual, mental, economic and physical violence experienced by girls and women. It has assumed such a dimension that it is a serious public health issue now

But a desperate Meera cannot return to her parents' home. Apart from the "social stigma" of such a move, her father, by now a proud parent of a son, does not recognize her as a legitimate inheritor of his property. Her right to her matrimonial home will also be denied to her. If she were Muslim, Meera would be legally denied maintenance after divorce. If she were Christian, she would not be able to divorce her brutally violent husband because the relevant personal law (except in Maharashtra and Kerala) permits divorce only when cruelty is compounded by proven adultery.

If Meera becomes widowed, in many parts of India she would lose any right to dignity and happiness. It is with this perspective that several campaigns in the women's movement in India have focused on amendments in laws. In doing this, several struggles have been fought for Meera and the millions of women she represents.

It is important to recognize that for a country of India's magnitude, change in male-female relations and the kinds of issues the women's movement is focusing on, will not come easy. There are new challenges like religious fundamentalism, globalization and commercialization of agriculture, consumerism etc. For every step the movement takes

forward, there will be a possible backlash, a possible regression, and women continue to have to confront patriarchy within the home, in the workplace, throughout their lives. Activists are never tired of repeating: "out of the deepest repression is born the greatest resistance"

I have only one request.

I do not ask for money, although I have need of it.

I do not ask for meat.

I have only one request.

And all that I ask is that

You remove the roadblock from my path.

Sakhi, Women's Resource Centre,  
Trivandrum 35, Kerala.

## CURRENT ISSUES - 2

### The Encyclical “Caritas in Veritate”

**Tissa Balasurya**

Tissa Balasurya, theologian and social analyst working at the Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo, offers an Asian reading of the Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. He appreciates the clarity with which the Encyclical deals with the present challenges to humanity and to the Church. That love is more than mere law and justice is the powerful message of the Encyclical. However Tissa Balasurya observes that in order to relate love with truth, a truthful analysis of the Church's involvement in the historical causes of the present divide between the rich and poor countries has to be undertaken. Giving a lot of historical data he invites the readers of *Caritas in Veritate* to a constructive study of the Encyclical

The Pope affirms that the Second Vatican Council “probed more deeply what has always belonged to the truth of the faith, namely that the Church, being at God's service, is at the service of the world in terms of love and truth. Paul VI set out from this vision in order to convey two important truths. The first is that *the whole Church, in all her being and acting — when she proclaims, when she celebrates, when she performs works of charity — is engaged in promoting integral human development*. She has a public role over and above her charitable and educational activities: all the energy she brings to the advancement of humanity and of universal fraternity is manifested when she is able to operate in a climate of freedom (11).

#### **The Positive Contribution of the Encyclical**

Benedict XVI deals with the present challenges to humanity and

the Church, and updates Catholic social teaching with reference to them. He studies issues such as the ethics of business, globalization, the role of technology, the right to life, sexuality and family life, abortion, euthanasia, migration, labour unions, outsourcing of production, consumerism, mass media and communications, climate change and dangers to the environment and the future of humanity on planet earth.

Reflecting on the present economic crisis the encyclical offers some guidelines for the ethical conduct of business and prevention of abuses such as speculative use of financial resources for short term profits.

Stressing that economic life has been detached from ethical considerations he calls for "a new way of understanding business enterprise". (40). Managers of businesses should not be concerned only with profit for the shareholders. Shareholders and managers must act responsibly on the interests of stakeholders such as workers, suppliers, and consumers who contribute to the life of business. The free market cannot ensure that managers invest their capital ethically in the world share markets. Global multinational corporations are powers not guided by ethical considerations or state regulations but rather by profit for shareholders and income of managers dealing with immense funds.

Every life is a vocation to find fulfilment in "love in truth" – love of God and of neighbour in community and the nations and the world at large. Every economic decision has moral consequences. The State has a role to regulate the economy. In addition to law, charity (love) demands a relationship of gift, of graciousness in dealing with God's gifts to humans.

He welcomes the role of civil society with a more people-centred ethic, social conscience and responsibility, rights and duties. "It is essential to cultivate a public conscience on human rights such as for food and water."

Noting the great increase in wealth in the world alongside the increasing inequality among countries and within countries, Benedict XVI urges "a reform of the *United Nations Organization* and likewise of *economic institutions and of international finance*, so that the concept of the family of nations can acquire real teeth." There is urgent



need of a true world political authority to manage the global economy: to revive economies hit by the crisis, to avoid any deterioration of the present crisis and the greater imbalances that would result, to bring about integral and timely disarmament, food security and peace, to guarantee the protection of the environment and to regulate migration". (67) Hunger is a global problem calling for resolution through norms of solidarity (love) and institutions to ensure a fair distribution of food and water.

On all these issues he recalls the teachings of the Church since 1891 and reflects on the lessons of contemporary challenges. He points out the dangers of attachment to ideologies, the evils of corruption in political and economic life, of relativism and totalitarianism, of the need of religious freedom and inter-religious dialogue, and of action together for the common good of all, universal fraternity.

Analysing the positive and negative potentialities of modern developments like science, technology, globalization, modernity, in these issues the Pope tends towards a middle path away from ideologies, and fundamentalisms. The crises that humanity faces are challenges and opportunities for us "to re-plan our journey", with a positive vision for the future with confidence in the God of love.

Caritas – love – is more than law and justice. "Caritas transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving. The *earthly city* is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties but to an even greater and fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy, and communion...". The Pope emphasizes justice as a primary requirement of charity. "I cannot give what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice.(6)"

This encyclical is a valuable document that could be used for reflection in study and discussion groups in parishes, in universities, seminaries and civil society groups. It touches on contemporary issues giving a background to the problems and orientations for critical analysis and practical action at different levels. It shares positive thinking, and gives hope linked to action for change at different levels. Groups in the different continents could reflect on the general principles enunciated

and decide on how to foster the options suggested by the Pope. The Bishops Conferences of England and Wales are putting out a document as a follow up of the encyclical.

### Some Missing Dimensions in the Encyclical

The Pope gives a good analysis of present problems and articulates an ethics of business enterprise and of relationships of persons and communities. He proposes the Church teaching as the solution for their deficiencies. He presents Church history as implicitly on the side of charity and truth, understanding *caritas* as a gift, graciousness, mercy, forgiveness over and above justice.

The encyclical does not analyse the way the modern world has been set up with an association of Christians with governments and colonial powers, especially from 1492 to 1945. The Pope seems to overlook the inadequacies of the Church in the course of history. I will mention here some of them of the five hundred years since 1492. The Catholic Church was closely associated with the invasion of the lands of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and Oceania. In addition to plundering the riches of these lands, the Western invaders virtually exterminated almost the whole of these people in North America. It is estimated that there were 80 million Native American population in these lands in 1492, but by 1600 their numbers had been reduced to one million due to wars and diseases brought by the invaders. (cf:Joerg Rieger "*Christ and Empire*" Fortress Press Minneapolis, 2007, p.283).

Ulrich Duchrow writes "...the conquered territories are robbed of their precious metals and raw materials with the aid of fire-arms and slavery, and ninety percent of their inhabitants are killed in the greatest genocide in world history. Robbery and murder of the peoples of America, Africa and Asia is the basis of Europe's wealth and world leadership." (Ulrich Duchrow "*Europe in the World System 1492 – 1992*", WCC Publications Geneva 1992, p 4) Cf. "Eduardo Galeano: "*Open Veins of Latin America Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent.*" Monthly Review Press , NY, 1974

The map of the modern world was made mainly by European (colonial) expansion which was by invasion and capture of weaker peoples territories, by expelling the natives further into the interior, by

their murder and virtual extermination, by wars among colonial powers, and even by purchase of vast areas of land from colonisers, usually after their conflicts.

### **The Acquisition of Land**

The purchase by the USA from France in 1803 of an area covering 2,144,000 sq km / 828,000 sq mi, including the present-day states of Louisiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Oklahoma. The price paid was \$15 million (60 million francs), or roughly 4 cents an acre. The purchase doubled the size of the USA. It is called the 'greatest land deal in history'. Texas was bought from Mexico in 1848 for \$15,000,000. Mexico ceded to the United States nearly all the territory now included in the states of New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, California. Texas, and western Colorado was purchased for \$ 15,000,000 and the U.S. assumption of its citizens' claims against Mexico. Alaska was bought for \$ 7,200,000 from Russia in 1867. It is the largest state in the USA. Thus USA was bought and formed in large measure for \$37,000,000. Is this legal according to international law, or even rational reasoning? Are they not sales of territory conquered or stolen from previous occupiers such as the native Americans.? Is the USA to control such amount of territory for all time or even during the rest of the 21st century, whatever the demand for land and food may be in the rest of the world as in Asia and Africa. Similar histories could be written concerning the formation of many other colonial enterprises such as the states of Canada, of Latin America, Russia, Australia and New Zealand. Africa was carved out into European colonial possessions at the Council of Berlin in 1885.

This is what passes for the present world order, legitimized by the UN system, set up with their national borders as inviolable. It consolidates centuries of European victories, pillage, colonization, exploitation, and marginalization of other peoples. The structural adjustment policies of the IMF, and the World Bank do not call for structural improvements in relation to population and land. Only factors such as capital, resources and technology are considered mobile in the so called "free market" and "free world". The present distribution of land among the peoples is taken as legal and unchangeable, except with their consent.

**Migration** The encyclical refers to migration of peoples but does not consider how the world map, as it is, was formed by European migration in the past few centuries to the rest of the world which were their colonies.

"Between 1800 and 1930 the White proportion of the world's population expanded from 22 to 35 % " [p 209 Times History of the World ]

Overseas Migration from Europe between 1846 and 1924:

Great Britain and Ireland	18, 030,000
Norway	804,000
Sweden	1, 145,000
Denmark	349,000
Netherlands	207,000
Germany	4, 533,000
Belgium	172,000
Switzerland	307,000
France	497,000
Spain	4, 314,000
Portugal	1, 633,000
Finland	342,000
Russia	8, 000,000
Austria \Hungary	4, 878,000
Italy	9,474,000

55 million people migrated from Europe between 1846 and 1924. Is this not the greatest migration and settlement in human history? In this period Chinese, Indians and Japanese also moved, but much less and often as labourers. pp. 209, 225 , 245

It would be good for present peoples of European origin to reflect on how they were able to migrate in the 19th century when their population was increasing, and they had problems like the Irish potato famine. How have Christian peoples and countries treated problems of global migration? Have they practiced genuine love and openness



towards others in need? The Encyclical does not deal with this major issue that will be crucial in the 21st century with foreseeable demographic trends.

### **United Nations Organisation**

Reform of the United Nations Organisation proposed by the Pope is a necessary agenda for the world to meet current problems. To it can be added considerations of how the present nations were formed. How much are they the fruit of (in)justice, not to mention lack of love! Do not the colonial powers owe a debt of reparation to the exploited indigenous peoples? The historical record of Christianity would be much worse if the encyclical takes into account the Crusades, the Inquisition, the intolerance of theological dissent, denial of religious freedom, and the wars of religion.

The Church needs to analyse how the message of love of God and neighbour revealed by Jesus Christ seems to have been gravely distorted during many centuries till the Second Vatican Council in 1962-1965. Has not the truth of history been so overlooked by Christians and the Church to forget the harm they have done to other peoples, other religions and nature itself during nearly a millennium? We can all profit by reflecting on the hundred and more apologies of the Pope John Paul II to the groups thus offended.

Pope John Paul II did not, however, take these apologies to their practical consequences of a good and integral confession and penance including: to assess the extent of the damage, reparation, compensation, firm purpose of amendment, avoiding occasions of sin. The tone of the encyclical would be less self justifying and more self purifying if it would undertake a good analysis of these historical realities, seeing also the neo-colonial re-domination of the world by the super powers and their multinationals. Can not the universities, seminaries and research institutes of Christians and civil society help us all in seeking the truth and action of justice and charity to build a better world as Pope Benedict desires?

The Church would have much to learn and to gain from a serious dialogue on these issues with activists and scholars of other faiths and cultures, who have not so pleasant experience and memory of Christian

powers during the past five centuries. As the Pope mentions the human community can get together to build a civilization of love and truth in this century which commenced with a "war against terror" since March 20

In his inauguration homily Pope Benedict XVI said

*"My real program of governance is not to do my own will, not to pursue my own ideas, but to listen with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by Him, so that He himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history."*

This reflection shows that the Catholic Church has had to correct herself on several issues during the course of the centuries. Some such issues are the following claims that the Catholic Church make:

a) that she is the sole possessor of the truth about God, ignoring that the Spirit of God is present to all persons, cultures and historical events and processes

b) that she is the unique and necessary path to human salvation.

c) that she can marginalize women in Church and society and exclude them from decision making.

d) that she could have recourse to violence as a means of spreading the faith,

e) that she could adopt authoritarian ways of suppressing dissent on doctrines.

f) that she can tolerate and even encourage colonial imperialist policies and profit from them.

The Catholic Church teaches that the way to human salvation depends on amends made to God the Father for the sins of humanity by Jesus Christ by his death on the cross. This view overlooked the social mission of Jesus in working for the liberation of the poor and oppressed. The Church accordingly stressed works of charity but neglected action for social justice and the reform of the social structures within countries and the world at large. On this basis Christian spirituality encouraged humble acceptance of domination by others, as a way of discipleship of Jesus who accepted suffering even unto death on the cross. This is said, to make amends to the Father for the sins of humanity.



Due to this perspective the spiritual life was interpreted more as a flight from the world rather than as a commitment to realise the Kingdom of God on earth. Over fifteen centuries, till recently, the accent in Christian spirituality was more on charity and works of mercy rather than on social justice. There was no insistence on the need of reforming the unjust world order which Christians helped to set up. Thus even at the beginning of the 21st century Euro-Americans control most of the land and resources of the world, forgetful of the core teaching of Jesus on sharing with the needy.

The liturgy was made more a ritual than an expression and experience of the love of God and neighbour. Thousands of times the Holy Mass can be celebrated in a country without much serious reflection and impact on social justice in a world of great inequalities and armed conflicts. Prayer and meditation can be, de facto, indifferent to unjust social realities and to gross violations of human rights.

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